BBC TopGear

JANUARY 2025

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THE ONE, THE ONLY AWARDS ISSUE

0 TO 60? UMMM...
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JACK RIX

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BBC TG
Issue 391

Winter is coming, as Jethro Snow puts it on page 60. He's not talking about getting his big coat out, but the permafrost that seems to be setting into the car industry. EVs going unsold, sports cars and hot hatches fading into obscurity, hybrid assistance adding weight to just about everything.

It all depends on whether you're a glass half full or empty kind of a person really, because out of the gloom comes shards of sunlight. And if anything can find those shards and help them shine even brighter, it's the annual *TopGear* Awards – helping you to avoid buying sh*tters for over 30 years.

Yes, hybrid tech is being applied with abandon to performance cars these days, but manufacturers also know if they don't celebrate the combustion engine now, then when? Cut to Jethro driving a pair of 800+bhp super GTs, both with V12s unfettered by electricity, on the Grand Sasso massif. Doesn't sound too frosty to me.

Then there are SUVs and crossovers, multiplying faster than Gremlins in a downpour and the scourge of centre of gravity and estate car fans everywhere... except the car industry is nothing if not adaptable, so when one section of it becomes saturated, the diversification begins. Like Hyundai's unnecessarily good looking Santa Fe that we take on a life affirming tour of New Zealand to visit our most far flung subscribers. Or the new Dacia Duster that seems to answer everything you could possibly ask of it, but no more.

Hybrid supercars, like the Lamborghini Temerario, might be poised for a hostile takeover, but 2024 also gave us the McLaren 750S – peak distillation of the modern, non-hybrid supercar; total fireworks on track, and yet still so usable and thrilling on the road. Or how about the McMurtry Spéirling that, as Ollie Marriage describes, isn't really a car, but "a shortcut to the future".

Nowhere do we see more convergence towards white goods than with lookalike, drivealike and soundalike EVs... and yet, here's the brilliant new Renault 5 to prove that with a little thought and a lot of love, it's possible to build EVs we want and can also afford. So charge your glasses (half way up) and raise a toast to the car industry that despite the doom mongers, continues to deliver.

Enjoy the issue,

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WHO: OLGUN KORDAL
A man dedicated to the art of fine car photography, Olgun doesn't even mind shooting at 1am in a car park. In Newbury

WHO: PETER STRAIN
Give Peter a brief (and a pencil) and he will create a dazzling illustration that far exceeds your hopes. See Gordon Murray on p90

WHO: JETHRO BOVINGDON
A man of simple pleasures – all he needs is two of the world's most desirable cars, an empty Italian plain and unlimited fuel

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HUGO Eyewear available at Specsavers

Frames worn by Yuki Tsunoda

Specsavers

‘Bel Can-do’

In November 2022 we introduced the Bel Canto. Instantly making haute horology accessible. This subtly chiming timepiece caused a cacophony. And enormous demand. (The first 600 sold out in 8 hours.) Asked could we produce 5,000 annually, our Swiss CEO Jorg Bader Snr replied: “No. But we’ll find a way.” Because that is our way. Today, our supply chain is as fit for purpose as the gear chain of the new Bel Canto Classic. Which features a dressed-up dial. A dialled-down handset. And a gorgeous guilloché finish, with a precision only achievable (and affordable) using a femto laser. Outward displays, we like to think, of inward grace.

(Bel Can-)Do your research

Christopher
Ward

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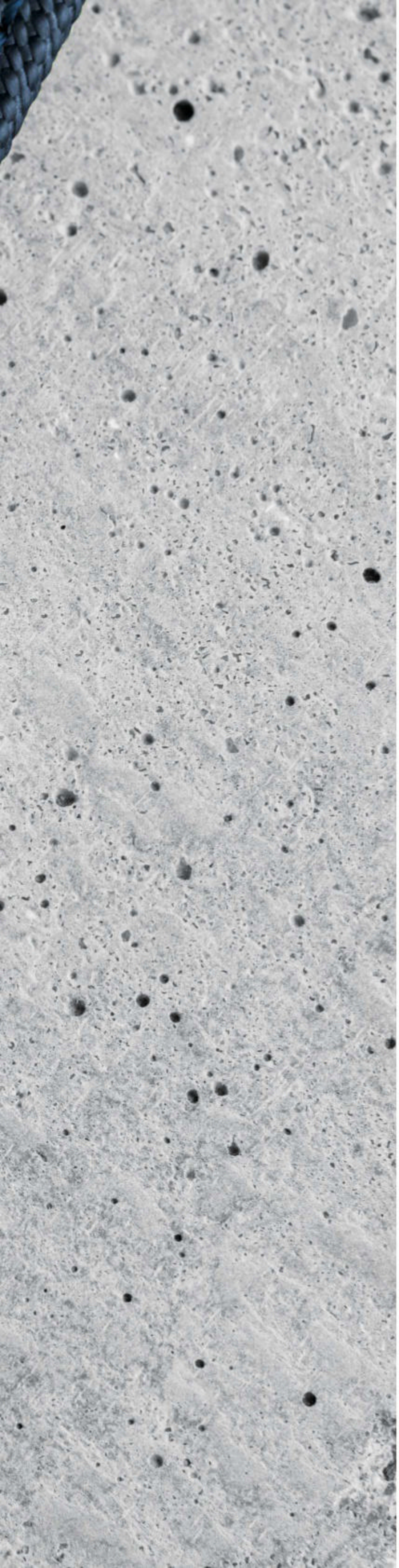

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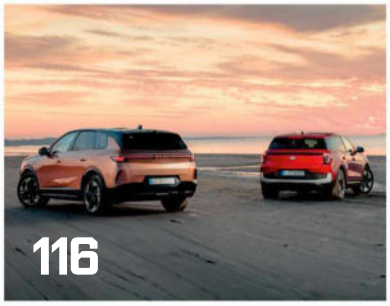

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D-DAY CHANNEL CROSSER

UNMISTAKABLE STYLE AND PRESENCE

EXPERIENCE ELECTRIFYING PERFORMANCE WITH A NEW GENERATION OF EV ROADSTER

MG Cyberster

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TRENDING

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WHEEL NUT

The D-Day Channel crosser

To commemorate his father's service in World War Two, Nigel Stoate and his son sailed the Channel – and back – in their 1944 'DUKW' truck

WORDS OLLIE KEW
PHOTOGRAPHY TOM BARNES

To give you an idea of the sort of man Nigel Stoate is, when we ask him to pull the star of this story – his amphibious GMC-manufactured 'DUKW' landing craft – out of his garage, he has to fire up the 9cyl, 400bhp radial engine of his Sherman tank to move it out of the way first. "My wife won't like the mess the tracks make of the lawn," he grimaces.

Luckily for Mrs Stoate, Nigel occasionally takes his pride and joy a little further afield than the back garden. Back in June 2024, he sailed his DUKW (military code for 1942 design utility all-wheel-drive tandem axle) to Normandy. It disembarked the Royal Marines mothership and waded ashore to the mournful sound of bagpipes at 07:25 sharp – the exact time British boots reached French shores 80 years ago.

D-Day commemorations complete, he simply turned it around and sailed it right back home, with only his 14-year-old son Ryan and mechanic Jason aboard in the load area during the 200km, 28-hour voyage, across the busiest shipping lanes on the planet.

The obvious question is "Are you certifiably insane?" but that seemed a tad rude, so I went with "Why?" instead. "We have to remember what those men did 80 years ago," is Nigel's solemn response. "It is because of their bravery that we have our freedom today." Today he's adorned in the exact uniform his father would've worn for the action (had the artillery pieces he was assigned to been delivered on time). Earlier he's modelled authentic tank commander goggles for us. Enthusiast? Yeah, just a bit.

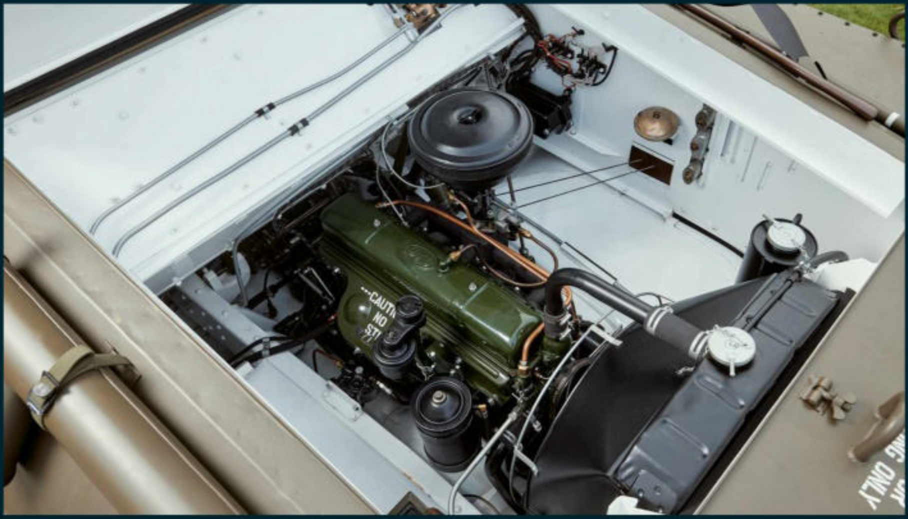
The next most appropriate question is "Why do you have an amphibious landing craft in your backyard?" Turns out Nigel relaxes from his day job of patent litigation at global law firm Taylor Wessing by being a human encyclopedia for World War Two hardware.

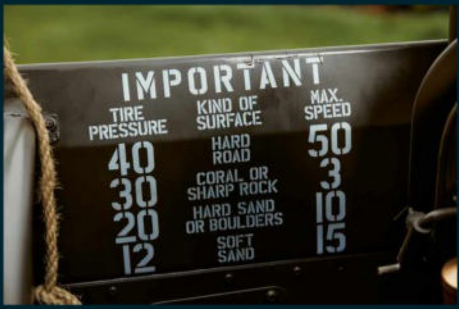
"They built 20,000 DUKWs in the war and they were hugely successful. It was the single vehicle that allowed Allied amphibious landings to work, because it allows you to take men, weapons and supplies from ships offshore to a beachhead in one operation. That means you're not stuck on the beach with a boat, trying to unload it, which is vulnerable.

"Most DUKWs didn't survive because besides enemy action, you put them in the sea and they're only steel so they rust away. This one was reserve stock in the US and kept in the desert, but by the early 1990s it was in need of a proper restoration, so I acquired it."

Nigel's DUKW is in just as good a nick as his sharply creased uniform. Despite its cross Channel odyssey, the bodywork is blemish free, the (sealed and infamously

As figureheads go, a full size Nigel is an unusual but excellent choice. Bravo

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MAX. SPEED
40
HARD ROAD
50
30
CORAL OR SHARP ROCK
3
20
HARD SAND OR BOULDERS
10
12
SOFT SAND
15

Worst comes to the worst, just wait for the tide to come in and then you can be on your way

SAND
CORAL
HIWAY
TIRE PRESSURE

hot) engine bay is surgically clean and the cockpit is adorned with fabulous authentic signs advising on speed limits for road, hard or soft sand, and coral. You don't get that in your Range Rover's terrain response menu.

Also the owner of a 1960s Amphicar 770, Nigel is partial to stuff that can swim the school run. Common wisdom is the end result is so compromised it's a hopeless boat *and* car, but the DUKW's the exception.

"A DUKW is amazingly competent in water," Nigel beams. "She has two bilge pumps, which are always running when the propeller's engaged. She'll take a 4in hole and keep up with the flooding. So she's fine as long as the engine's running – which is why we rebuilt this one twice before the voyage.

"And we were on our own. We didn't have backup, so we had a lot of safety equipment. We fitted a life raft, we had a satellite beacon. If the worst was to happen, we had a satphone with us that would ping our location to the coastguard." He admits even the Royal Marines said what they were up to was a bit risky.

Now he and his DUKW are literally home and dry, he's deeply proud of the endeavour. "It was a real honour, following as closely in my father's footsteps as we could."

NEW METAL

Win win?

The updated 911 GT3 and (now four seater) GT3 Touring are here. Choose wisely

VIJAY PATTNI

MEET THE NEW BOSS… SAME AS the old boss. Sort of. Porsche has re-energised its already very energetic 911 GT3, and to cut a mediumly long story short, the answer's "yes, yes you do".

Because it'll still likely be a benchmark performance car. For this 2024 edition – marking the GT3's 25th anniversary – you'll be able to choose from either the GT3, or cooler GT3 Touring (right) from the start.

One is the more correct choice of course, but both come with that familiar 4.0-litre 6cyl nat-asp boxer engine. Only the cylinder heads have been revised, while the GT3 RS donates its cams to its baby brother for "even more dynamic performance in the upper engine speed range". The oil coolers and throttle valves have also been 'optimised'.

Power is an unchanged 503bhp, though torque drops from 347lb ft down to 332lb ft. Still mighty fast, though: the GT3 will go from 0–62mph in 3.4secs with the 7spd PDK box (3.9secs for the 6spd manual), and tops out at 193mph (194mph for the manual).

Speaking of gearboxes, both manual and PDK were treated to a final drive ratio that's now eight per cent shorter than before.

Other modest changes arrive in the form of a recontoured front diffuser, tweaked spoiler lip and modified underbody fins that subtly increase downforce and better the airflow. There are redesigned headlights that allow for bigger air intakes, while at the back the diffuser, air inlets and rear lid have also been tweaked. The GT3's wing gets freshly angled sideplates.

Speaking of wing, the Touring does without one of course. There's also an option to spec in rear seats in the GT3 Touring for the first time. There are aluminium wheels that save 1.5kg versus the old GT3, the option of magnesium wheels that save 9kg, and a slightly lighter battery.

How much? In the UK, both GT3 and GT3 Touring start from £157,300.

Familiar looks, familiar drive, familiar cabin. And absolutely nothing wrong with that

HIT or MISS

Two titans of the editorial team have it out

TOM FORD

_TG_'S ASSOCIATE EDITOR RECKONS THE NEW 911 IS A TRIED AND TESTED RECIPE

You want boring magic? You have it here. Not that the GT3 is in any way boring, but to get a 500bhp naturally aspirated petrol engine through the new emissions regs is nothing short of Gandalf-level tuning wizardry. Which means we get to enjoy a manual or PDK GT3 in secret service (Touring) or carnival (Track) spec for another few years. The gains might feel marginal, but when you realise that the fist of regulation is closing fast on these cars, a GT3 that's better than the last one is, frankly, amazing. And Porsche has delivered exactly what we've all been asking for. It's the same recipe, but when it tastes this good, you don't burn the cookbook.

"Porsche delivers what we've all been asking for"

OLLIE KEW

_TG_'S DEPUTY EDITOR ISN'T FALLING FOR ALL THE PORSCHE MARKETING GUFF

Leaving aside all the "you can't buy one unless you promise to sweep the floors in the nearest Porsche dealership and name them the beneficiary of your will" cynicism... is the new GT3 actually new enough, or was it simply time to facelift it according to marketing? For £30,000 more than the 992.1 GT3 cost originally, you get a couple of suspension bits off the GT3 RS, a smidge less torque and the shorter final drive we've been insisting upon for about a decade. It doesn't feel like a lot. And then there's the cheek of asking another £30k for the Touring's lightweight package. Sorry, I'm buying a GT3 – the lightweight, track day 911!

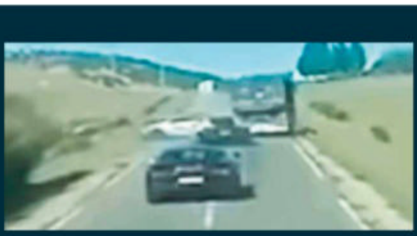
"Was it simply time to facelift it according to marketing?"

VIRAL

Around the world in seven questionable car stories

1. Mexico
Subaru rolls off truck... and nearly off a cliff

If you were ever in doubt about the importance of strapping a car down on a flatbed truck... watch this. A video shared on social media shows a Subaru WRX rolling off the back of one while up a mountain road in Mexico, only coming to a stop while teetering precariously off a cliff. And breathe.

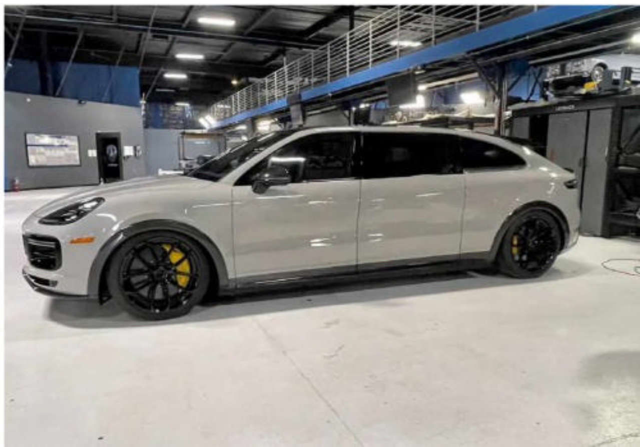


2. Morocco
Chirons collide in expensive accident on grand tour

Two Bugatti Chiron owners were left shamefaced after colliding while trying to overtake a truck on Bugatti's 2024 Grand Tour in Morocco. The duo, one in a Super Sport and one in a Pur Sport, came to blows trying to overtake, with the truck overturning as it was forced off the road. Gonna be one heck of a repair bill...

3. USA
Zuckerberg gifts wife custom Cayenne Turbo GT minivan

What to do when your other half wants a minivan for your growing family and money's no object? Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg turned to West Coast Customs to build a custom Porsche Cayenne Turbo GT minivan, complete with sliding rear doors, for his wife. Love it or loathe it?



4. USA

LeBron James pranks son by filling Lambo Urus with cereal in Nike advert

In the build up to LeBron and Bronny James' history making season opener when they became the first father and son duo to play in an NBA game together, a Nike advertisement saw James Sr pranking James Jr by filling his son's Lamborghini Urus with cereal. LeBron is seen pouring Fruity Pebbles through the Urus' sunroof, before he hears Bronny coming out of the house and scarpers as his son opens the car to a cascade of cereal. "Hey rook, you better not be late," LeBron shouts, adding "Clean up my driveway, it's a mess" before driving off. "Yo, you're too old for this," Bronny responds. Still won the game though.

5. UK

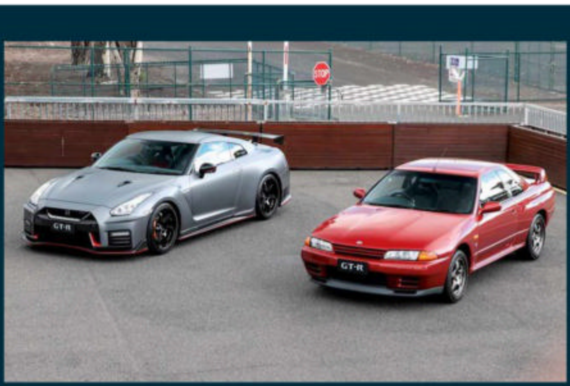
Porsche 911 owner gets £114k compensation after mechanic fails to return car for 11 years

A Porsche 911 owner has won £114k in compensation after a mechanic returned it (unfixed) 11 years after it was sent it in for repairs. Dr Penelope Horlick left it with Jagjiwan Jhally in 2010, before he dumped it outside her house after she sued him.

6. Brazil

Lance Stroll beaches car on formation lap

Aston Martin's Lance Stroll had a day to forget at the Brazilian GP after he crashed on the formation lap and beached his car in the gravel trap attempting to rejoin. Cue a delayed start and much ridicule.



7. Australia

R32 Skyline GT-R stolen from Nissan HQ

A rare 1991 R32 Skyline GT-R has been stolen from under Nissan's nose at its Australian headquarters near Melbourne. Yeah, that'll be long gone.

coffee break

What we're watching/listening/doing, while we should be ~~working~~ enjoying Christmas

***CBeebies Christmas Panto*, BBC iPlayer**
Beauty and the Beast is 2024's pick for the CBeebies panto. It'll be on repeat in our house until well into 2025... but *not* on Boxing Day

Boxing Day football
There is no winter break this year for our millionaire sports stars so sit down for a 12:30pm KO and a full day of Premier League action on Amazon Prime. See how many games you can watch before you tuck into leftovers

Boxing Day swim
If you don't like football, but love being cold, then the 51st Boxing Day swim in Tenby starts at 11:30am on the North Beach. Other UK locations are also available. But not Tamworth

Jools' Annual Hootenanny, BBC2
Tune in to watch the clock hit midnight on New Year's Eve and welcome in 2025 with Jedward, Mika, Hoobastank and Another Level. Jokes, we dont know if these legends will *actually* appear

Very dry January
Time to recover after the holidays and put down the sauce. The gravy boat's empty. The fridge is bare. All that's left is bone dry turkey and a rubbery veggie wellington

PLAYLIST

SCAN HERE TO FIND THEM ALL

Procrastination ahoy! Six videos you need to watch now

ALL THAT JUNK

A huge unexplored junkyard full of glorious, but crumbling classics... this we had to see. Jack Rix is your guide to the Disneyland of barn finds

McXIMUM ATTACK

Everything you need to know about the P1 successor that sounds like a postcode... and the one tasked with making the V6 Ferrari F80 look a little underengined. Plus... *that wing!*

SHOOTING STARS

Fair to say that the class of '24 is a varied and multi-talented bunch. We got them all together to explain why they're each deserving of *TopGear* silverware

M5 RE-BOOT

Shock! The new M5 has not found a place in our hearts... but the M5 wagon? Here's hoping that it will be able to right the multitudinous wrongs of the new saloon. Tom Ford explains it all

HOT OR NOT?

No pressure, Alpine A290, but the future of the hot hatch as we know it is on the line here. Can the hot version of the Renault 5 convince us that EV performance cars are a thing?

TWR SUPERCAT

A V12 engined restomod XJS with in excess of 600bhp... now you're talking. Cancel all holidays, forget all birthday and Christmas presents, turn off the heating and go on a diet – you'll want to save up for this one

COMMENTS

BRABUS ROCKET GTS

THE GOOD

THAT IS GORGEOUS… I'D LOVE ONE

Cool Dude

Now that is one clown shoe I wouldn't mind wearing!

Morten Dalgaard

Genius!

manicm

Finally a meaningful car coming on the base of a pointless Mercedes. Thanks Brabus

Andy Reynolds

I love it. It's a proper Batmobile!

jerome71

THE BAD

The shape has potential but that raw carbon look is doing it absolutely no favours

O__VER

It's like a boy racer snuck into the Brabus design department one night

Guernzee

SERIOUSLY, WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON AT THE BACK? THIS HAD CLASSIC POTENTIAL IMO BUT THEY'VE JUST RUINED IT

mn06

It looks like a kit car that was built by father and son in their garage on the weekends

J Vale

LAME DESIGN FROM A BORING CAR REBADGE

Troy Roncaglione

THE UGLY

FOR THE LOVE OF GOD LET'S BE DONE WITH THAT CHEAP JANKY 3K WEAVE CARBON INTERIOR GARBAGE

Jon Severson

What a vile, tasteless creation

Peterson

Mansory level of hideousness

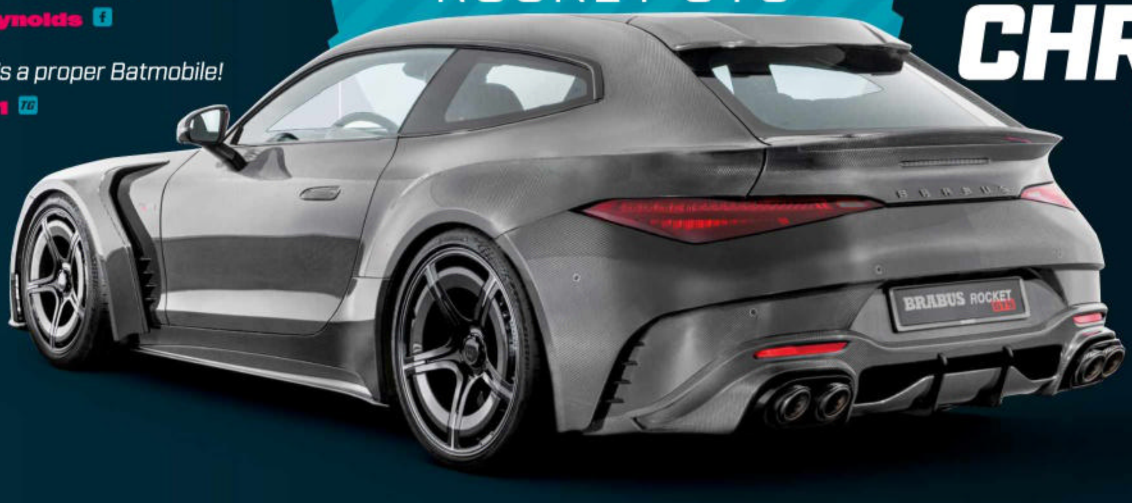
hazy leftie

This may be the nadir of the ugliest TG.com homepage ever; the woeful Capri, dire Mini Aceman, that ridiculous Zagato Alpine, and now this… thing, which manages to out-munter the lot of them

David Paul Evans

JESUS CHRIST

Tyler Gunter



WE ABSOLUTELY ADORE THE 'CLOWN SHOE' – BMW'S BOOTED Z3 M – sure it looked a little ludicrous, might not have been as good to drive as the E36 M3 and sold in tiny numbers, but it's a cult hero and we won't hear a word said against it.

If you are desperate to criticise a strange shooting brake sports car though, may we present the new Brabus Rocket GTS. We applaud Brabus for making the Mercedes-AMG SL more practical, but those rear spoilers will be giving us nightmares for weeks.

The press release for this car proudly announces that it is "the first hyper gran turismo shooting brake with exposed-structure carbon body in Brabus history". Bit niche but Brabus isn't lying. The coachbuilt body is all made from pre-preg carbon fibre and gets wide arches, new intakes and a new lip spoiler up front. At the rear there's a monster diffuser, a Brabus high performance exhaust with light-up tips and of course that new hatchback rear end. Time to cancel that Skoda Superb Estate order? **GREG POTTS**

WATCHES

La bella vita

Italians know how to live the good life – cars, food, wine... and watches too it turns out

WORDS: RICHARD HOLT

ANYONE WHO WATCHES F1 KNOWS about the *tifosi*. Italian fans take devotion to entirely new levels, following Ferrari with an intense love that turns to heartbreak when things don't go according to plan.

In the watch world, Italians show similar levels of commitment. Twice a year they hold a giant watch fair in Parma, where hundreds of thousands of immaculately dressed watch dealers and fanciers obsess over vintage Rolexes and Omegas.

In the 1990s a group of Panerai fans started chatting online and saying what they did and didn't like about various watches. They called themselves the Paneristi, and eventually the community grew so much that they now hold big real-life meetings all over the world.

The brand started listening, and ended up openly collaborating with the Paneristi on new watches. What started as a bit of online chitchat made other watch companies jealous and they are now constantly looking for ways to interact with buyers, rather than just presenting new stuff and hoping it flies.

Italy is not particularly known for watches, and most of the Italian firms still make their watches in Switzerland. But while they might employ Swiss watchmakers, Italian companies want to make it very clear that in design and spirit, they are pure Italian. The *tifosi* wouldn't have it any other way.

PRO TIP

An Italian man will think nothing of laying out his ironed trousers and shirt on a bed together to see if the outfit works. A Brit is more likely to pick clothes off the floor and sniff them to make sure nothing stinks. We could all do with taking a more Italian approach to watch buying. You don't need a watch for every outfit, but checking it looks good with the things you usually wear is a start.

BLOW THE BUDGET

Panerai Submersible

Panerai in its modern form began in the 1990s, taking the idea of an old Italian military diving watch and reimagining it into something modern. With the help of the Paneristi it makes watches like this one, with 300m water resistance, a sleek ceramic bezel that matches the black rubber strap... and the sleeve of a dinner jacket or wetsuit. £9,100; panerai.com

UNDER £4k

Bulgari Aluminium

The Roman fashion house likes to make watches with ancient coin-style bezels with the brand name written around the outside. It has an automatic GMT movement in a 40mm aluminium case with a rubber bezel. Also water resistant to 100m. £3,540; bulgari.com

UNDER £2k

Anonimo Epurato

Anonimo was founded in Florence in the late 1990s and makes a lot of diving watches, as well as more dressy ones like this. The automatic movement is made in Switzerland, the leather strap is handmade in Italy. It has a 42mm steel case. £1,990; anonimo.com

UNDER £1k

Locman Montecristo

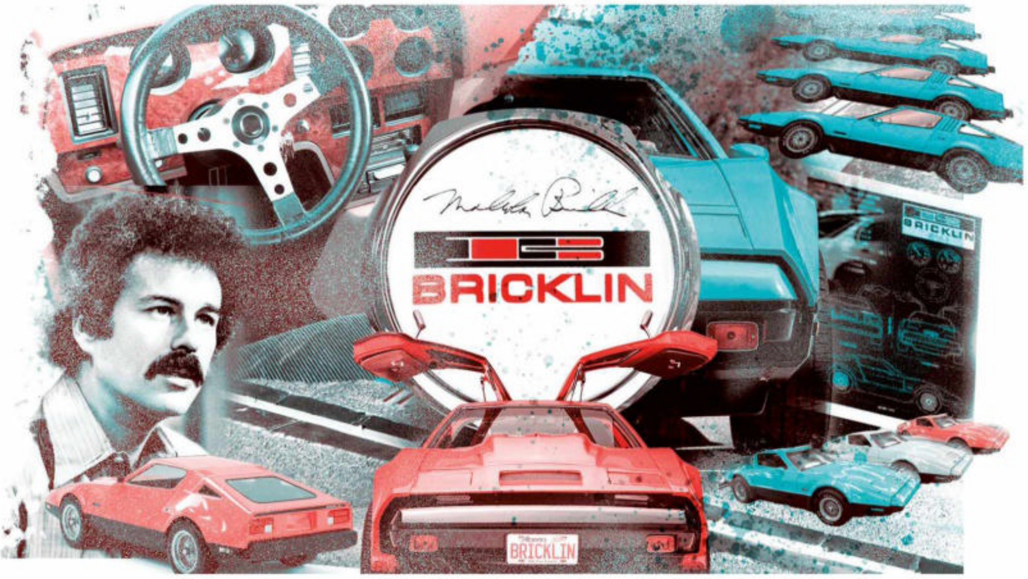
A brand formed in the 1980s by two Italian men, one whose name starts with Loc, the other with Man. The Montecristo has an automatic movement in a 41mm stainless steel and titanium case. Comes on a rubber or leather strap, or a steel bracelet. From £780; locman.it

The finest failures in automotive history

EPIC FAIL

BRICKLIN SV-1

WORDS: SAM PHILIP



At its launch in 1974, founder Malcolm Bricklin heralded his new sports car as nothing less than "the safest production car in the world". As it turned out, the SV-1 (short for Safety Vehicle) would indeed prove near impossible to crash. Just not necessarily for the reasons Bricklin had envisaged.

For starters, shunting the SV-1 required *getting into it* in the first place. Which, with a 41kg gullwing door to negotiate, was easier said than done. Sure, a hydraulic cylinder was intended to do the heavy lifting, but the mechanism would frequently fail, leaving owners helplessly trapped outside their $10,000 sports car. Which, with hindsight, was better than being helplessly trapped *inside* their $10,000 sports car in the event of a rollover crash.

> **"When the SV-1 actually drove, it did so slowly, making it tricky to have a high speed crash"**

And if you somehow managed to finagle your way into the driver's seat of an SV-1, there was still a strong chance it wouldn't actually go. Bricklin didn't only establish a whole new car company, but also a whole new factory in New Brunswick, Canada, a locale rarely referred to as 'the epicentre of the car building universe'. This bold gesture gave the world a chance to discover what happens when you put construction of a very complex car in the hands of a novice workforce.

Build quality was broadly absent. The revolutionary fibreglass panels wrapped round the SV-1's steel chassis set new standards when it came to 'spectacular warping', cleverly discouraging owners from driving their Bricklin in the rain. The pop-up headlights generally... wouldn't, thus discouraging owners from driving at night. And when the SV-1 actually drove, it did so slowly, making it tricky to have a high speed crash.

Despite Bricklin promising to build 12,000 cars a year, fewer than 3,000 SV-1s were produced before the company went bankrupt. Which, of course, proved the smartest safety feature of all. What car could possibly be safer than one you can't actually buy?

THRILLS WITHOUT THE BILLS

Fast(ish) cars you can actually afford

AUDI S4 TDI AVANT (2019)

What is it?	Why are we interested?	Surely not?	Costs?
One for the head not the heart, but when a new Audi RS4 Avant costs over £63k, why not consider a used diesel pretender for half the price? Hello S4 TDI.	*OK, so the TDI has 344bhp rather than 444, but it also has 516lb ft... and it does 40mpg rather than an optimistic 30.*	*With Audi's Sport differential and 8spd Tiptronic, the S4 TDI can hit 62mph in 4.8secs. And it's precise and decent sounding. And not rare.*	*Very low miles 2024 cars with all the options can be had sub £50k, but earlier S4 TDIs are now well under £30k. Buy one before diesel becomes illegal.*

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100% GENUINE QUESTIONS

HELP!

The internet's most searched questions, rudely answered by us

WORDS: SAM PHILIP

THIS MONTH: **CAR MAINTENANCE**

1. Why does my car smell of petrol?

If you're driving a petrol car, could be a fuel leak. If you're driving an EV, could be that 'Eau de V8' air freshener you've got hung from the rearview mirror. Either way, why are you complaining? Petrol is the most delicious smell of all the smells. Consider yourself lucky.

2. Why does my car squeak when I drive?

Mice in the suspension. Call Rentokil.

3. Why won't my key turn in the ignition?

If the key won't rotate in the ignition cylinder, this could be because it's worn or damaged. On the other hand, it could be because you've just got into the wrong car. Hang on, those aren't your sunglasses in the centre console! And you don't even *like* Trebor mints. Oh God, you're in someone else's car.

4. What does the warning light on my dashboard mean?

There are many different faults that can trigger a dash warning light, so check your owner's manual to narrow it down. If the warning light goes off of its own accord, this could mean you no longer have a broken car. However, it may mean that you have a broken car and also a broken warning light.

5. What oil should I put in my car?

Depends on the car. Though all engines vary, if you've got a regular, non-performance car, 10W-30 is a good all-round oil providing protection in all weather conditions. If you live in a colder climate, consider a lower viscosity oil. If you have an Italian performance car, consider a cold press extra virgin olive oil with a dash of balsamic for added piquancy.

6. Why aren't my tyres wearing evenly?

Wonky tyre wear – for example a bald left rear – can indicate a range of underlying mechanical issues, including misaligned wheels, suspension faults or uneven tyre pressures. However, it can also indicate that you've been doing loads of donuts in your local Morrisons car park, desperately trying to coax your Renault Twingo into a sick drift. In your case, it's the roundabout hooning, isn't it?

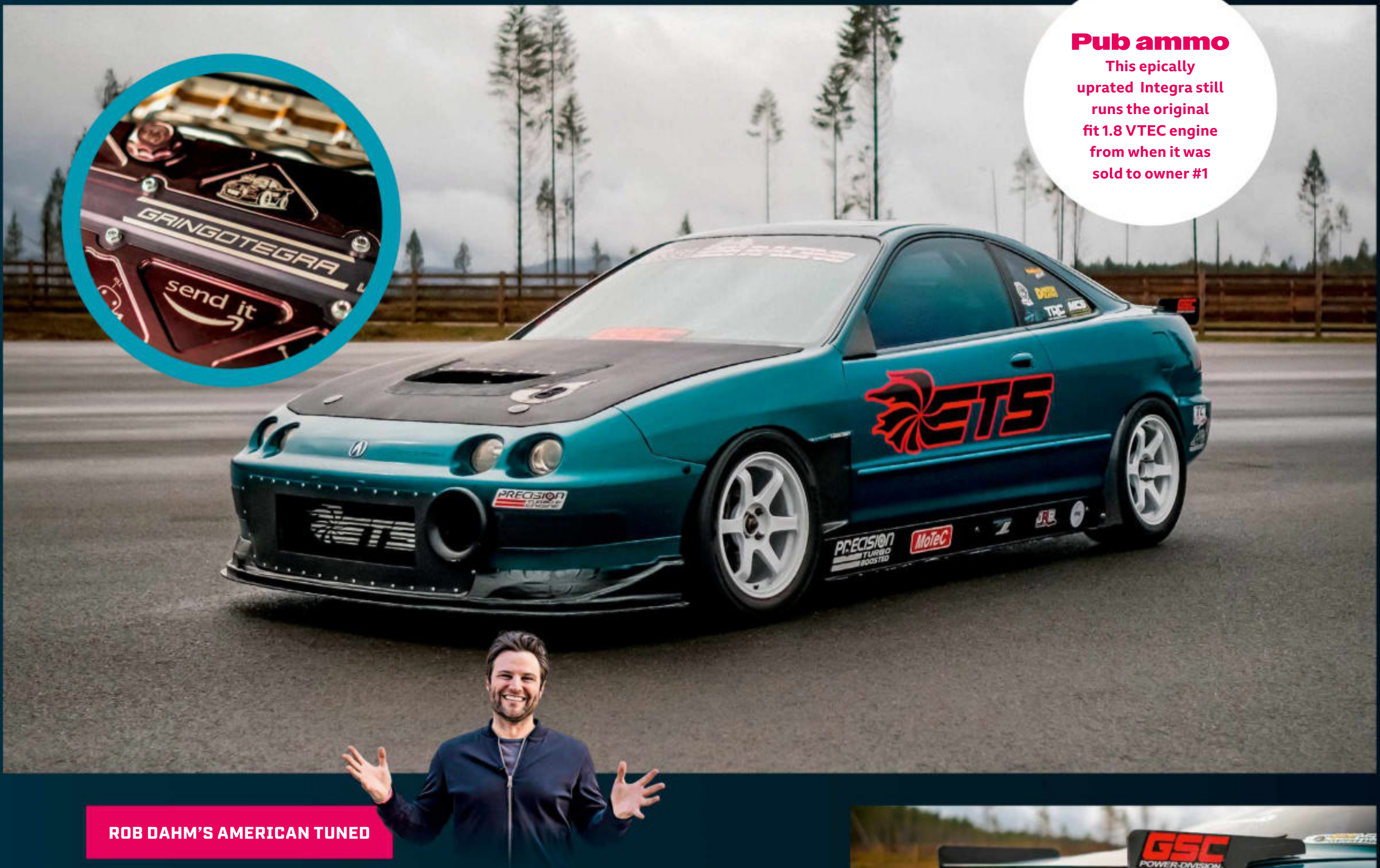
7. Why isn't my car accelerating?

Because you're driving a Suzuki Celerio.

8. Why is my car alarm going off?

Like, right now? Well, if you're not currently in the middle of a freak hailstorm, it's most likely either a) a fault with the alarm sensors or wiring, or b) someone breaking into your car. If it's a), best get the system checked by your local garage. If it's b), best get a baseball bat...

IMAGE: MANUFACTURER



Pub ammo

This epically uprated Integra still runs the original fit 1.8 VTEC engine from when it was sold to owner #1

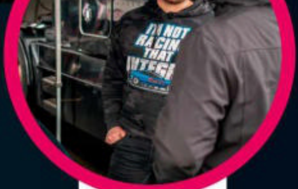
ROB DAHM'S AMERICAN TUNED

The fastest Integra in the world

Bought as standard then fettled to magnificent speed, this car has a hell of a story to tell

GSC
POWER-DIVISION

When you need to slow down in a hurry, use a parachute



AMIDST THE LUSH BACKDROP OF THE Pacific Northwest – and in the rain, naturally – the story of the world's fastest Honda Integra unfolds.

Once the world's fastest two-wheel-drive car, now all-wheel-drive, Myles Kerr's 1,500(ish) horsepower 'Gringotegra' excels in the worlds of half mile racing and 'no prep' – a form of drag runs on imperfect track surfaces to mimic street racing. Able to hit 195mph in the quarter mile (at 7.7.715secs), Kerr's hottest of hatches also runs a mind melting 216 mph in the half mile.

On this episode of *TopGear: American Tuned*, we dive deeply into the world of high speed racing, and that leads us on this Integra's journey. From its humble beginnings as a factory model, through the inevitable theft (the Integra was one of the most stolen cars in the States at the time) to its evolution into a machine that commands respect on the track, it's a car that's pushed to its limits regularly. It's a true 'test and tune' project, with its 'race, break, fix' cycle remaining unbroken for more than a decade and a half.

Kerr bought the 1994 Integra GSR in a rare state of bone stockness – that is, with a 1.8-litre VTEC yet untuned – back in 2006, and it was stolen in 2008. When police found it, the Integra had so much steering column damage that the insurance company marked it a write off.

Kerr bought it back, added a turbo kit, and its story diverged into tuner car territory. Now it revs to a relatively modest 11,000rpm. Modesty is different in the Honda world, with some mega rev outliers going into the 12s and 13s, although Kerr says his Integra retains a factory rocker arm and three lobe cam, and idles at 1,100rpm...

Beyond the technical feats, this Integra's is a story of resilience. It's a car that has seen its fair share of trials, from grand theft auto to the harsh realities of racing. Yet, each challenge has only added to its legacy, a testament to an unbreakable spirit of resilience.

Now go and watch the video

MYTH BUSTER

“THE GOLF GTI WAS THE OG HOT HATCH”

WORDS: PAUL HORRELL

MUCH AS I LIKE GERMAN CARS, OTHER nationalities do exist. German carmakers have a habit of pretending they invented everything. Back when it launched the M-Class, Mercedes called it the first luxury off-roader. Range Rover? Jeep Wagoneer? Both of them instantly erased from history. Audi laughably said the A5 Sportback was the first of its kind. The Mondeo Ghia wasn’t all that premium but it was a good car and it sat among a field of about two dozen other five-door fastbacks the same size. BMW called the X6 the first coupe-SUV. Which ignored the 2005 SsangYong Actyon, which might have been a crapbox but was also AFAIK the first.

VW doesn’t have to bang on about the Golf GTI being the first hot hatch. It’s able to step back and point out the rest of us make that claim. “It’s considered the original in its class,” crows a booklet published to mark 50 years of racing and sporty Golfs. Guilty as charged. We’re like a stuck record: the Golf GTI was the first hot hatch.

Of course it stays in the memory, because VW has been faithful to the format ever since, bringing out a GTI pretty promptly with each generation of Golf. And we’re up to eight now. Its rivals have been far flakier in maintaining their lines, dipping in and out of hot hatch sales with succeeding crises of insurance, theft or other general bouts of consumer nerves. So yup, the Golf remains top of mind, and we perceive it as the daddy.

Except of course it wasn’t. Some weeks before the Golf GTI reached its first buyers, Renault started selling the 5 Alpine. (Alpine was the name of a Sunbeam in Britain, so the 5 was called the Gordini here.) It wasn’t injected but was hotted up and had stripes. That said the Golf hit one milestone first, as it appeared at a motor show, Frankfurt, in September 1975, before the Renault.

Anyway, we can go back further. The Simca 1100 is these days a forgotten car from a forgotten brand, but it was a colossal seller across Europe in the early 1970s, and the twin-carb Ti version from 1974 has a reasonable claim to be an earlier hot hatch. Then again, one could dig back further, to the 1971 Autobianchi A112 Abarth.

These are just the ones with FWD and an actual rear hatch, disbarring the 2dr Mini Cooper or RWD BMW 2002 Touring. But history is written by the winners.

#7

THE VAPOURWARE FILES

THIS MONTH:
THE FALEN

What is it?

Like Beyoncé or Prince, the Falen wanted to be known by one name. Strange, really. It’s not as though there was much competition for attention in the realm of Scottish supercars. But in 2008, that’s what was promised by the Dowdeswell & Hardie design agency. A V10 track only monster, long before the McLaren Senna GTR or Red Bull RB17 were on the scene.

Did they actually build any?

Despite promising a limited run of four units, we can be sure no Falens ever existed outside of pixels. Because when TG *rang to ask the company how it was getting on, the voice that answered said “The Falen? Hang on a minute, he’s up in his bedroom at the moment...”*

Where are they now?

Hopefully, at a design agency with a career, not waiting for ma to call them down for their tea. Scotland is home to some of the world’s most stunning scenery and epic driving roads – it’s about time they had a McSupercar to enjoy on them.

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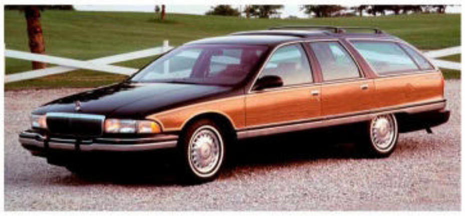
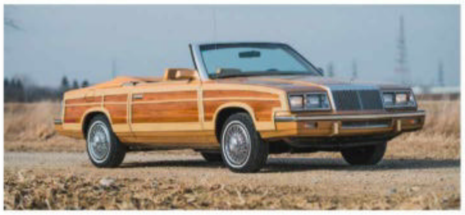
TOP 9 CARS WITH DODGY WOOD TRIM

WORDS: GREG POTTS



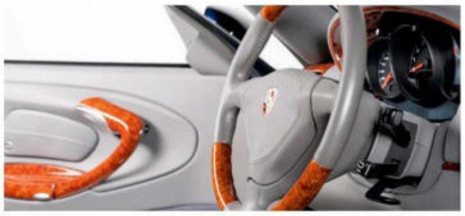
BUICK ROADMASTER

The 1953 Buick Roadmaster Estate was the last wood-bodied wagon mass produced in the US. That was real wood construction though, so it can't earn a place here. This is the 1990s rebirth of the Roadmaster with its 180bhp 5.7-litre V8 and terrible faux wood side panelling.



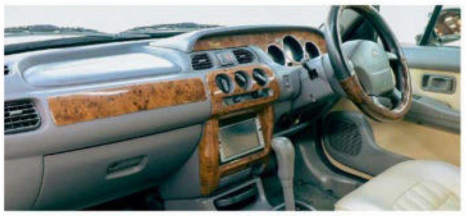
CHRYSLER LEBARON TOWN & COUNTRY CONVERTIBLE

The second gen FWD Chrysler LeBaron in Town & Country convertible form might be one of the worst looking cars of all time. Pushed on sale by Lee Iacocca with its dreadful fibreglass framework and vinyl panelling, only 1,105 were sold from 1983–1986.



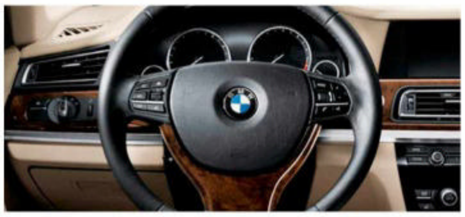
PORSCHE 911

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Porsche would let you spec supremely ugly wood trim for the 996-gen 911. You could have it on the steering wheel, dash, centre console, gearlever and on the door panels. Turns out what worked on a classic luxury saloon didn't really look right on a modern sports car.



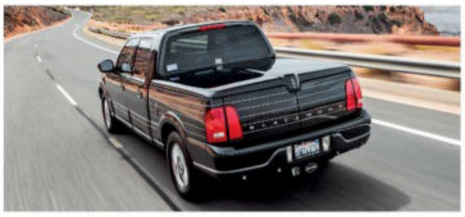
MITSUOKA VIEWT

The Viewt was Mitsuoka's rebodied K11 Micra designed to look like a Jaguar Mark 2. As you can imagine, it ended up looking terrible. As standard the interior was similar to the original Micra, but deranged buyers could spend more on leather and wood interior trim.



BMW E90 3-SERIES

When the E90 3-Series arrived in the mid-2000s it was available with a number of different woods gracing many of the interior panels. The burr walnut was particularly offensive and you could even option extra bits to cover half of the steering wheel.

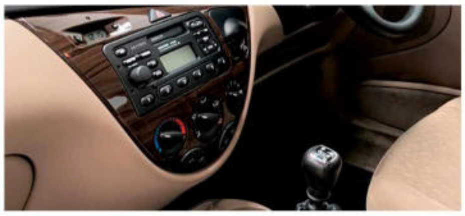


LINCOLN BLACKWOOD

Don't worry if you don't remember it – the poshed up Ford F-150 was a flop and only lasted one model year in the US. Named after the fake wood panelling wrapped around its bed, the Blackwood featured a 5.4-litre V8 and might've started today's posh pickup trend if it wasn't so dreadful.

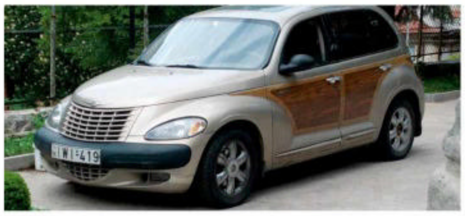
MAYBACH 62

The higher grade leather, reclining rear seats, optional side curtains and all of that wood probably seemed like a good idea at the time, but the interior of the Maybach 62 of the early 2000s has not aged well at all.



FORD FOCUS GHIA

Ford bought Carrozzeria Ghia back in 1970 and the name was for decades its top trim level on cars like the Granada, Cortina and Escort. It essentially threw in rubbish wood trim and an armrest. Perhaps the worst was the MkI Focus Ghia with its drooping semi-circle of cheap wood on the dash.



CHRYSLER PT CRUISER WITH WOODIE PACKAGE

As if it wasn't embarrassing enough, after a year on sale Chrysler decided the PT Cruiser needed a fake wood vinyl graphic pack inspired by old Town & Country models. The $800-ish 'Woodie Package' was offered between 2002 and 2004.

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

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ONE STEP FURTHER

September 2024 marked Hyundai's milestone of 100 million cars, and from the original Pony to the all-conquering IONIQ 5, there's plenty to celebrate

HYUNDAI

Hyundai's founder Ju-yung Chung was a true visionary of the 20th century. Starting with an auto repair shop in Seoul, he later expanded into construction, building essential infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and ports. Then, driven by his ambition for a better future, he founded Hyundai Motor Company in 1967.

Since then, Hyundai has played a pivotal role in Korea's growth. Today, its vehicles are found worldwide, having reached the remarkable milestone of producing 100 million units. At a recent ceremony at the Ulsan plant marking the delivery of its 100,000,001st vehicle, an IONIQ 5, President and CEO of Hyundai Motor Company Jaehoon Chang celebrated decades of progress: "Reaching a global cumulative production of 100 million vehicles is a meaningful milestone made possible by our customers around the world, who have chosen and supported Hyundai Motor since the very beginning," he said. "Our commitment to bold challenges and a constant pursuit of innovation has driven our rapid growth, and it will empower us to take 'one step further' toward another 100 million units as a mobility game-changer."

Indeed, Hyundai is currently establishing a dedicated EV facility at Ulsan. There, every new evolution and model has reflected a spirit of daring innovation that has seen spectacular results in the past 57 years.

1968

Cortina mk2

Hyundai's manufacturing history began with a knockdown assembly of the British Ford Cortina, which featured a front bench seat and column shift. While it was a very well-made car, the Cortina was designed for Europe's paved roads and struggled on Korea's predominantly unpaved surfaces. This challenge motivated Hyundai to develop a model specifically tailored to Korean road conditions.

1975

Pony

Unlike many manufacturers that emerged after WWII, Hyundai took just eight years to launch its first original model. George Turnbull from British Leyland, along with five of the UK's top engineers, contributed to the development of the Pony in collaboration with Giorgetto Giugiaro.

The Pony quickly assumed icon status, expanding Hyundai's reach beyond South Korea, and becoming a successful export in numerous countries. As Hyundai's – and Korea's – first independently developed mass-production model, it laid the foundation and processes for automotive manufacturers in areas such as R&D, production and export.

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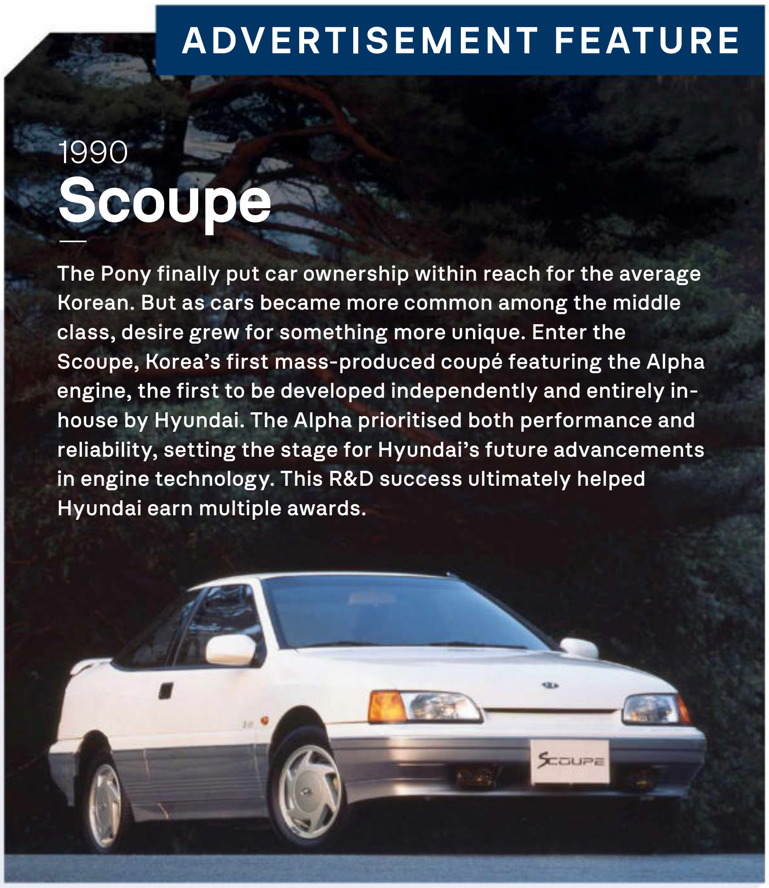
*When using 350kW DC charger, under optional conditions. **According to WLTP (Worldwide Harmonised Light Vehicle Test Procedure) criterion.

1985

Sonata

Korea's longest-running nameplate, the Sonata started life as a higher-end version of the Stellar – Hyundai Motor's second original passenger model. A special edition was also released for the 1988 Seoul Olympics. The first-generation Sonata offered cruise control and power seats, while the second, a FWD sedan, dominated the market.

The Sonata would become the standard, adopting Hyundai's 'fluidic sculpture' and 'sensuous sportiness' design philosophies. It was also the first car produced at Hyundai's Alabama plant, bolstering its global reputation.



1990

Scoupe

The Pony finally put car ownership within reach for the average Korean. But as cars became more common among the middle class, desire grew for something more unique. Enter the Scoupe, Korea's first mass-produced coupé featuring the Alpha engine, the first to be developed independently and entirely in-house by Hyundai. The Alpha prioritised both performance and reliability, setting the stage for Hyundai's future advancements in engine technology. This R&D success ultimately helped Hyundai earn multiple awards.

2021

IONIQ 5

Hyundai made a bold statement in the EV market with the award-winning IONIQ 5, a model that pays tribute to the iconic Pony through its retro-inspired design, symbolising the company's respect for its roots. Featuring Vehicle-to-Load (V2L) technology, the IONIQ 5 offers an impressive 354 miles on a full charge and can achieve 209 miles after just 15 minutes of charging.

This model signals both Hyundai's commitment to innovation and its full-scale transition into the era of electrification. The IONIQ 5 is manufactured in Hyundai's specialised global EV facilities, including the advanced Singapore Smart Factory.

1990

Elantra

After seven generations, the Elantra remains Hyundai's bestselling model worldwide, a testament to its value and user-friendliness. Starting with the second generation, the Elantra was designed and engineered entirely in-house.

The Elantra, a compact sedan, seamlessly combined performance with practicality and fuel efficiency, becoming a bestseller in Korea and many other regions. Notably, the Elantra was the first Hyundai car made using an automated assembly process.

UNEARTH THE STORIES BEHIND MORE REMARKABLE CARS AT **HYUNDAI.COM**

MIKE'S CHANNEL

Q: SHOULD WE SURRENDER TO THE ONLINE MEGASTORES?

The nights have drawn in and we're now well and truly into what's referred to as 'the gifting season' by people who've sold their souls in exchange for a degree in marketing. I've got to start buying presents for my mates, but with the cost of living what it is, I'm going to have to cut some corners this year. Enter Chinese online megastores Alibaba, AliExpress and Temu, home to rock bottom prices, bizarre product selection and wildly variable quality control.

As someone who is almost umbilically online, I've been lightly obsessed with these retailers for some time. Because everything on the planet is made in China, the range of items available is absolutely dizzying. Where else can you find bootleg Ninja Turtle figurines on sale alongside a pair of jeans that make it look like you've ostentatiously wet yourself? That's a rhetorical question – if you know a place, I'm categorically not asking for directions.

A glance at my notifications from the AliExpress app *at this very moment* reveals that it's trying to tempt me with a hydraulic crimping tool. I have literally no idea what in my life might require crimping, hydraulic or otherwise. I can barely build an Ikea bookshelf. But given that I can instantly order, for example, a wrist-mounted barcode scanner, presumably designed for supermarket cashiers who want to pretend to be Spider-Man, there must also be thousands of automotive accessories available. So I've decided to look for some choice festive gifts for my petrolhead pals.

First up is Peter, who owns a BMW M2 Comp and two dogs. Typing 'car' and 'dog' into the search bar proffers an elaborate dog 'hammock' for the back seats, which keeps the canines entirely contained and the interior protected, for just £16.82. This strikes me as perfect, the dogs can enjoy the experience of the M2 in the twisties and Pete will be able to just tip out all the marrowbone jelly dog vomit at the end of the drive. Present number one, nailed.

Jason, meanwhile, is a little trickier to buy for. He's got a McLaren 720S and appreciates the finer things in life, so he's unlikely to be impressed with any old plastic tat. And tempting as it was to buy him a £6.71 'diamond' steering wheel cover, with its obvious luxury appeal, I'm settling on the one thing the 720S can't offer: a manual gearbox. Specifically, a 75 pence manual gearbox keychain from Temu, metal gated and with a movable gearlever. Present two, sorted. I'm on a roll.

Finally there's Martin, a self-confessed Toyota tragic with a deep, abiding love for all things JDM. The solution is clear: for a trifling $9,000 on Alibaba I can buy him a reproduction bodyshell for a Toyota AE86 Sprinter Trueno. Alright, it's not a complete car, but it's like those magazines where you get a different piece of a model kit each month. Only, overall, probably cheaper. Present three done, now time to eat my own weight in festive cheese truckles. Happy holidays all.

Mike Channell is a TG writer, multimillion subscriber YouTuber and occasional racing driver. Not evidence of a strong work ethic, just an attention span obliterated by too many videogames

ILLUSTRATION: WALTER NEWTON

GAME OF THE MONTH

STAMPEDE RACING ROYALE

Free, Playstation/Xbox/PC

If you thought getting drilled by a *Mario Kart* shell and watching the entire 11 car field blow past you was frustrating, just imagine it with 60 bloodthirsty human players, all armed with two stroke motors and homing power ups. Except you don't have to imagine, because, after a period percolating in early access, *Stampede: Racing Royale* is now out, for free. *Stampede* is an extremely polished kart racer, built by the folks behind the *Sonic & Sega All Stars Racing* series, but owes as much to hilarious obstacle course game *Fall Guys* as it does to any racer. The concept works brilliantly and each of the three rounds per event has a different texture as the field gets whittled down. It's not as perfectly formed as *Mario Kart 8* (what is?) and has less variety than *Fall Guys*, but it is free to play and that's hard to argue with. **MC**

GEAR

COSWORTH CCW MK2 PRO SIM WHEEL

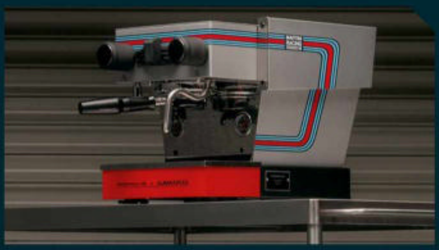
shop.simrep-engineering.com; €11,936

This is an exact replica of the Cosworth CCW Mk2 wheel that's used by teams in LMP2, IndyCar and Super Formula. Hugely expensive, but if people are willing to drop £10k on a sim racing wheel that helps to fund development of Bugatti's new V16 engine, they have our support.

HUF X LAND CRUISER COLLECTION

hufworldwide.co.uk; from £18

HUF is back for another collaboration with Toyota. The latest collection is all about the Land Cruiser and features some glorious jackets, jumpers, socks, caps and T-shirts with 4x4 graphics, iconography from the Toyota archive and even vintage Land Cruiser adverts.



PORSCHE X LA MARZOCCO LINEA MICRA ESPRESSO MACHINE

shop.porsche.com; £5,270

Looking for ways to improve your morning coffee? Maybe you need your coffee machine to be inspired by the Martini-liveried Porsche 911 Carrera RSR. This La Marzocco machine has been developed in collaboration with Porsche. It's based on the Linea Micra portafilter model but will be limited to just 911 *eye roll* units.

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The W1 and F80 are here, but they leave Jethro a bit cold…

So, now we know. The Holy Trinity of McLaren P1, LaFerrari and Porsche 918 Spyder is finally delivering a sequel. Albeit without a new entrant from Porsche. Its pure EV concept, the Mission X, seems to have been quietly shelved, perhaps in reaction to the poor sales performance of cars like the Rimac Nevera and Lotus Evija. Let's call it the Unholy Duality, then. McLaren W1 vs Ferrari F80. How is this one going to play out?

Well, without a V12 screaming to the far side of 9,000rpm, that's for sure. The Ferrari has adopted a 3.0-litre twin turbocharged V6, plus a front e-axle to create a 4WD hybrid monster. The look is a sort of 1980s view of the future. Brutal, dense and deeply aggressive. The tech is derived from, or at least informed by, the 499P endurance racer. And the result is pretty spectacular. The F80 has 1,183bhp, can accelerate from 0–124mph in 5.7 seconds and is stuck to the road by up to 1,050kg of downforce.

The W1 is equally outrageous. In fact, it has even more power. The 4.0-litre twin turbocharged V8 and radial flux e-motor combine to deliver 1,258bhp. It's lighter than the Ferrari, too. But as the W1 is RWD the acceleration figures are a shade slower than the F80's. It produces 1,000kg of downforce. I mean, what doesn't? When the twin test finally arrives it's set to be a titanic struggle.

> **"Both W1 and F80 will provide an industrial sized shot of adrenaline to the nervous system"**

The question is, does anyone care? Don't get me wrong. The idea of driving a W1 or F80 is thrilling. The performance is mind scrambling and there's little doubt both will provide an industrial sized shot of adrenaline to the nervous system. But maybe the game has changed. The search for 'more' is surely a dead end? Nobody needs to go as fast as a McLaren 750S or Ferrari 296 GTB, let alone these new creations. Performance is a drug, no question. But when you can't access it for more than a split second on the road, isn't it a bit of a buzzkill?

Well, maybe. And yet, people do care. A lot. It's fair to say that the W1 and F80 are already hugely successful. They are sold out – 399 McLarens and 799 Ferraris, generating in excess of £23 billion of revenue. Our YouTube video of the F80 reveal has done vast numbers. There will be fistfights over who attends the press drives. So, any criticism of them is vaguely ridiculous. Yet, here goes…

Are they a bit predictable? And, dare I say, a bit forgettable? To me, the hypercar scene is now defined by opposites: the wonderfully light, pure, usable GMA T.50, and the aero obsessed Aston Martin Valkyrie. One remasters the old with incredible engineering artistry, the other pushes the boundaries and elevates road cars to a new plane entirely. They are already iconic. Every bit as inspirational as an F40 was back in the 1980s or an F1 in the 1990s.

By comparison, the W1 just seems like, well, a McLaren with an even bigger stick of dynamite up its tail. And the Ferrari traces a motorsport direction that most people would like to reverse in order to reignite the spectacle of light, agile cars fitted with engines you can hear from the next continent. They perfectly represent the futile pursuit of more, yet somehow don't seem quite enough.

Host of TopGear America, Jethro has driven most things, mostly sideways, and forged a reputation as one of the world's most fearless road testers. Only one thing terrifies him – electric cars

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BARNES

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www.brooklandswatches.com

NATALIE PINKHAM

PINKS

F1 can bring happiness to an entire nation, says Natalie

One benefit of the traffic in Mexico City is I get the opportunity to take in the sprawling metropolis on my way to the track each day. It's a visual feast, but one image dominates every street corner – Sergio Pérez. If the Mexicans have something to sell, they tend to stick his face on it.

He's not the only F1 homegrown hero who's deified. Max Verstappen singlehandedly brought the Dutch GP back on to the calendar after a 36 year hiatus and Franco Colapinto's rise has reignited Argentina's love of the sport, giving them someone to shout about for the first time in over two decades.

Why does it matter so much to have one of your own on the grid? For smaller nations, it puts them on the map. Finland for example: aside from silent stoicism and saunas, how much do you know about this Nordic nation? Yet Kimi and Valterri's epic drives have put the Finns firmly in the sporting spotlight.

This patriotic pride sets off a spark which lights up the financial engine of the nation. Fans flock to buy merch with their flag on it. Local brands jump on the opportunity to sponsor their driver, associating their product with speed and glamour. The Checo effect has attracted thousands of fans from around the globe to Mexico City, filling the hotels, restaurants and shops.

> **"For a nation's youth, F1 drivers are proof that you too can become a gladiator on the world stage"**

For a nation's youth, F1 drivers are the ultimate superheroes. They are proof that you too can escape suburban obscurity and become a gladiator on the world stage. If it happens to be someone who grew up speaking the same language and eating the same food as you, then your dreams feel attainable.

When Yuki Tsunoda joined the grid, interest in Japanese motorsport exploded. Brands in Japan quickly lined up to get his endorsement for everything from energy drinks to luxury watches. Japan was of course already a tech and motor giant, but Yuki made it interesting for a new, young, international audience.

F1 drivers can also become a government's distraction tactic. Look over here at our sensational speed demon, rather than our unfavourable rates of inflation. I remember in 2012, in my first year at Sky Sports, travelling to Venezuela to do a feature on Pastor Maldonado. The crowds were 10 deep to watch him show off his Williams on the streets of Caracas. The last thing anyone was talking about was the tanking economy, especially when he smashed it into a kerb during the demo run.

Morale soared too in Brazil after any of Senna's triumphs. His victories were unifying, bringing hope where otherwise there was economic doom and gloom, and political instability. F1 racers bring more to their country than just trophies. They are the poster children of national pride, community cohesion and economic stimuli. They inspire kids, rally citizens and bring the country's flavour to the global table. In Mexico this year, when Checo was the last driver to take the chequered flag, 110,000 fans were still on their feet until the very last lap.

Natalie Pinkham is first and foremost a motorsport nut, but also a presenter for Sky Sports F1. Nobody knows more about the sport, or has better behind-the-scenes access to the paddock and drivers

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BARNES

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This essential research is used by BBC Studios and the editors of the magazines to shape future content and strategy for the magazines. We would really appreciate your time to help us with this research. The survey will take less than 10 minutes and is being conducted according to Market Research Society guidelines. All of your responses are completely confidential.

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THE ONE, THE ONLY AWARDS ISSUE

2024 – a year of elections and Olympics, AI and Oasis... fortunately there were also some quite good cars. Time to name the best of the best launched in the past 12 months. Welcome to the world famous *TG* Awards

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN WYCHERLEY

PACKAGE

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postal service

TOUR

What better way to test the Hyundai Santa Fe's SUV-ness than hand delivering *TopGear* magazine to each and every subscriber in… New Zealand?

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE **PHOTOGRAPHY** ROWAN HORNCASTLE

On the first day I'm five metres off the deck picking Trevor Kalkhoven's ripening avocados. On the last I'm shaking hands with Steve Muilwyk at Stirling Point looking out towards Antarctica. In between I've covered 3,099 miles around New Zealand in one of the lengthiest, most varied and strenuous roadtrips in *TopGear* history. Its aim? To deliver magazines to the 21 New Zealanders who subscribe to the British magazine. Oh, and test the new Hyundai Santa Fe to the limit.

Welcome then to the *TopGear* postal service, motto: "going postal since 2024." Even by the standards of our dear own Royal Mail, the *TG* Post isn't an efficient service, given we have just one vehicle, one driver and 21 packages to deliver around an area considerably larger than the British Isles. But on the plus side Fujitsu has been nowhere near the planning of this.

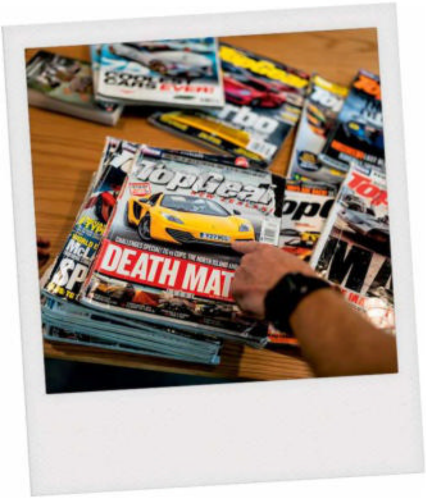
The Santa Fe's colossal 628-litre boot is untroubled by a box containing special issue magazines, Stig keyrings, pens, bags, T-shirts and other bits that our worldwide subscribers don't normally have access to. First stop is the main NZ Post depot on the outskirts of Auckland to learn how to convince people to sign for suspicious packages. Not really, I'm here to see its hydrogen truck.

As we'll find across New Zealand, the sustainability pressure is on. Everyone from the national postal service to adventure firms running bungee jumps is being told to decarbonise its vehicle. For NZ Post that means trialling a Hyundai Xcient fuel cell truck. It's been a big hit, covering over 60,000 miles in two years and as the infrastructure has improved the refuelling time to put 31kg of hydrogen on board has dropped from seven hours to 10 minutes. I go for a ride and discover it's smooth, quiet and, unladen, has a surprisingly punchy turn of pace. No problem with parcel delivery here.

We're used to Hyundai being at the cutting edge of tech now, often as not mating that with bold, imaginative design (see Ioniqs 5 and 6). But with the Santa Fe, design leads. Underneath it's 'just' a hybrid. You can choose between regular or plug-in, in both cases the electric is supplementary to a 1.6-litre 148bhp turbocharged 4cyl. Not a lot of engine to push along 1,965kg of family SUV. This one's the milder of the two, sporting a tiny 1.4kWh battery that feeds a 64bhp electric motor and delivers less than a mile of clean, silent range.

In New Zealand it's probably the one to have. Despite the pressure, electric isn't catching on out here. EVs and PHEVs accounted for just 14 per cent of the market in 2023, this year it's dropped to five. The problem is a small population, much of it rural, across a large area.

It's one we're facing too. Just not on day one, which sees me heading north from Auckland into dense subscriber territory: five to visit, the most northerly of whom, near Whangārei, is Trevor Kalkhoven. Probably one of our longest term subscribers anywhere, he's recently celebrated 25 years of having the mag sent to New Zealand. Giving him three more and a Stig keyring feels rather inadequate. Especially since he invites us in for coffee and sends us on our way an hour later with the Santa Fe's nifty front and rear hinged centre bin stuffed full of his avocados.



Inevitably our nonstop headlong dash around New Zealand meant we couldn't meet every subscriber, and not everyone wanted to appear on camera. Some people we struggled to contact at all (many

SANTA FE
hybrid
QNA484
HYUNDAI NEW ZEALAND

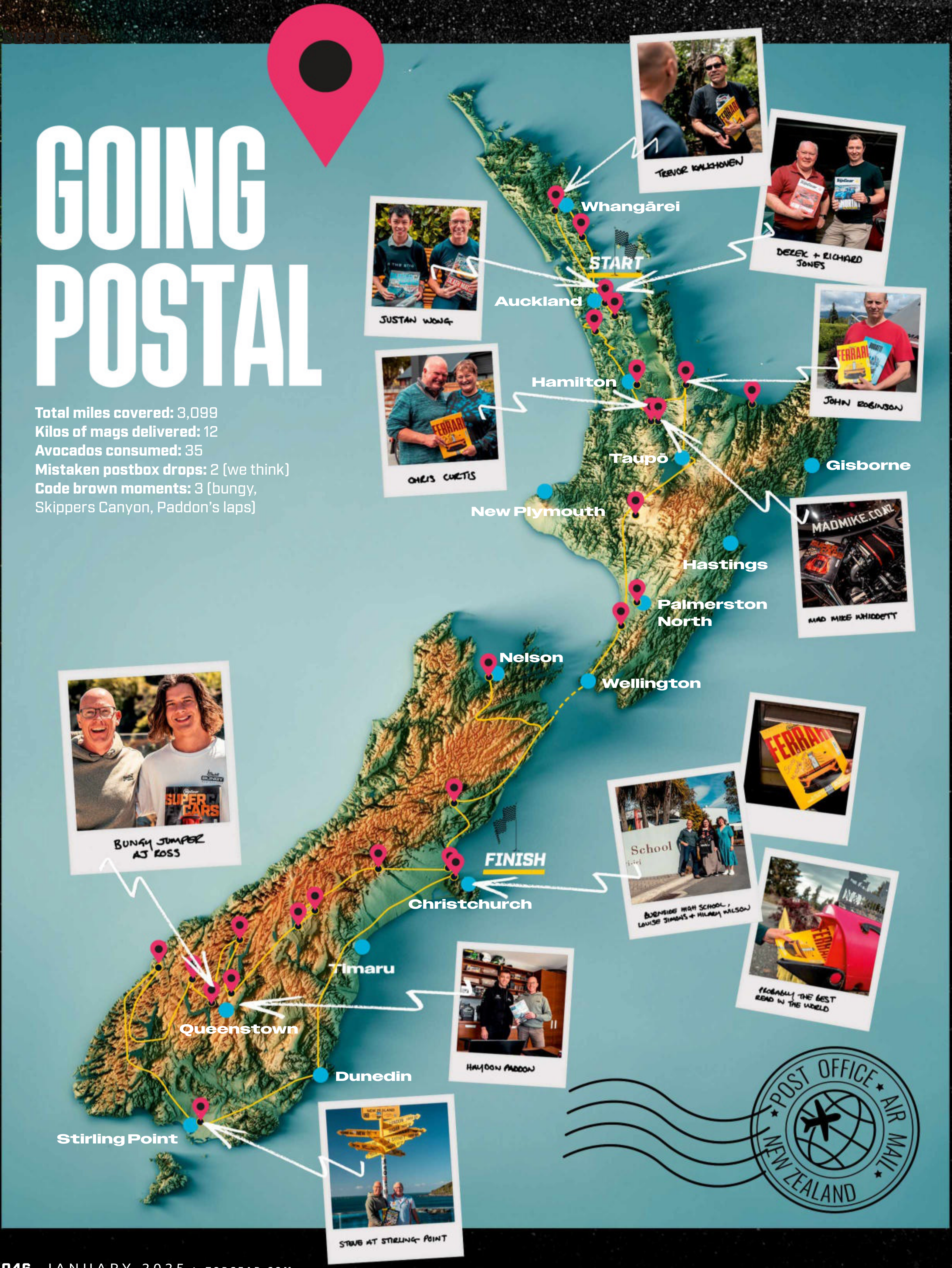
HYUNDAI SANTA FE CALLIGRAPHY HYBRID

Price: £46,775
Engine: 1598cc 4cyl turbo hybrid, 212bhp, 270lb ft
Transmission: 6spd auto, AWD
Performance: 0–62mph in 9.8secs, 112mph
Economy: 40.9mpg, 156g/km CO_2
Weight: 1,965kg

> "HE SENDS US ON OUR WAY STUFFED FULL OF AVOCADOS"

GOING POSTAL

Total miles covered: 3,099
Kilos of mags delivered: 12
Avocados consumed: 35
Mistaken postbox drops: 2 (we think)
Code brown moments: 3 (bungy, Skippers Canyon, Paddon's laps)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assumed it was a scam when we first got in touch), others got mag drops in their postboxes. But then in Silverdale we dropped in on Justan Wong and his collection of impressively well thumbed *TopGear* mags, many of which were older than he is. Watch this one – he's so eager to be a car designer he's doing a distance learning course in Germany from his home half a world away. Back into Auckland that evening we drop in on Derek and Richard Jones (son Richard subscribes for his dad for Christmas each year) and among his Aston Martins and McLaren, get a reminder of home.

The following day we continue our journey south, with mag drops for drift superstar 'Mad' Mike Whiddett and, unbeknownst to each other, our two closest subscribers, living within a few hundred metres of each other in Cambridge. A diversion north takes me to John and Nicole Robinson in Tauranga via Hobbiton where I am cruelly denied the opportunity to post a mag through Bilbo's letterbox.

New Zealand starts low. A gentle pulse of hills, rivers and vegetation has characterised the landscape thus far. Somehow similar to the UK, somehow different. Rounded hills sweep and sway, the earth soft, rich and easily eroded by powerful water. In places this bucolic landscape peels back to reveal its volcanic undercurrents. Central to Maori culture, Rotorua and Taupō bathe in their own steam baths – mud bubbles, ferns tremble, rocks emerge, the land hardens. This is Tongariro, the high barren plateau dominated by a core of idling volcanoes, their summits sacred to the Maori.

It snows on the flanks of Ruapehu. It's the first opportunity I have to exercise the Santa Fe and the four wheel drive makes a decent fist of masking the summer tyres' deficiencies – it's biased to the front but shifts power around smoothly. It's spring here, the temperature rises, snow melts, grip returns, but body roll doesn't. The Santa Fe holds itself together well in a corner, the steering is accurate, the nose tacks itself to a line.

It's been a decent cruiser too, but then we haven't been going at autobahn pace. The dual carriageway runs out 40 miles south of Auckland and won't restart until 40 miles north of Wellington. In between everything moves at 58mph – partially because that's what the trucks do and partially because there are cops everywhere. So the Santa Fe returns 40mpg. Yeah, it would be doing better if it were a diesel.

Trouble is, sometimes I think it is. The 1.6 is thrashy and coarse when the revs rise, so I tend to leave it in Eco mode and not go for the overtakes. Drive gently and the complexities of this hybrid powertrain, with its regen braking and snoozy six-speed auto, are hidden. It's quiet and harmonious. Give it some and the relationships between components quickly break down. The electric motor doesn't have enough torque, forcing the 1.6 to overwork, which in turn asks questions the slurring gearbox struggles to answer.

These manners are at odds with the image the Santa Fe projects. This is a smart and sophisticated looking car, but more than that what strikes me is its ability to blend in to diverse environments. In urban landscapes or when I park it outside the extraordinary copper coated Isthmus lodge on Lake Hāwea, the Santa Fe holds its own. It's a bold, confident, striking piece of design that sits beautifully against radical architecture.

And then I take it to the back of beyond: the ashy desert slopes of Ruapehu, Piha black sand beach, Milford Sound's sheer sided fjords, deep canyons that writhe below mountains in the Southern Alps, and discover the Santa Fe works there too. It looks tough, rugged and prepped for adventure. Appearances can be deceptive.

Sheep and mountains, that's the Kiwi reputation, isn't it? Factor in cows and flatlands too. But something else is in evidence. And no, it's not just the swaying number 11s painted on every back road. But let's dwell there for a second. We have boy racers, here the stereotype is the 'mullet and singlet clad' bogan, bred not on hot hatches but muscular, rubber laying Falcons and Commodores. They're a gradually dying breed – the car culture leans more towards Japan these days.

But the actual culture, the feel of the place? Pure number eight wire. Call it Kiwi ingenuity, a reference to the belief there's nothing that can't be done with a length of 4mm wire. And there's plenty of it around seeing as it's the stuff that fences every field. It's a mindset, an approach forced on New Zealand by its remoteness that gave rise to a generation of original thinkers, many of them in motorsport. If you want your eyes opened, Google Burt Munro, Bruce McLaren, John Britten or Richard Pearse.

We sail from Wellington – New Zealand's most cosmopolitan, vibrant city – one evening and wake the next morning in a different world, Caribbean palms swaying by Scottish lochs. The coastline dazzles much of the way to Christchurch, where we drop in on one of our two NZ schools that subscribe. The Burnside High year eights are on study leave, but librarians Hilary Wilson and Louise Simons gratefully receive a stash of mags and assure us the teachers will probably get as much from them as the students.

A postal drop in Methven takes us towards the mountain spine that dominates South Island. A throwaway line in the Hyundai's brochure got me thinking. "All new Santa Fe gives you generous living space for festivals, picnics or camping. Fold down the rear seats and enjoy a best in class terrace-like space." Er yes, they mean the boot. So let's test just how loungelike it is with a spot of stargazing alongside the telescopes of the Mt John observatory.

Hyundai hasn't built in a mattress or even some Rolls-Royce style viewing platform seats. In fact it's hard to discern anything that's been done to create a "generous living space for festivals" at all. Because that's marketing talk, not design reality. The truth, as far as you and your family are concerned, is much better. All the seats slide, fold, recline and move with Volvo-like slickness. One button press and the middle row tips and scoots itself forward to ease access to the rear row. To give the marketeers some credit the 1,949-litre boot is genuinely big enough for two of you to sleep in, while the glass roof of this flagship Calligraphy version does mean a partial view of the night sky. Still, it's all a bit estate agent-speak and unnecessarily demeans one of the most spacious and well thought through load bays and passenger compartments around.

Which we soon get to put to the test. Two people loom out of the dark. I assume they've come from one of the telescopes, but no, ill prepped tourists out for a sunset walk a couple of hours ago and now lost, thirsty and looking for help. We manage to squeeze them, plus Rowan, videographer Charlie and all our filming kit into the Santa Fe

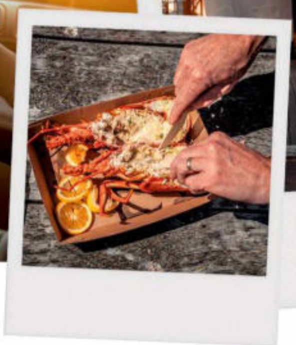
WITH THANKS TO: RYAN BEALE & NZPOST.CO.NZ, MT JOHN OBSERVATORY (DARKSKYPROJECT.CO.NZ), THELINDISGROUP.COM FOR MT ISTHMUS LODGE, AJ ROSS & MIKE VOYCE AT BUNGY.CO.NZ, HAYDEN PADDON & HIGHLANDS.CO.NZ, HYUNDAI NZ & UK, AND ABOVE ALL, OUR SUBSCRIBERS

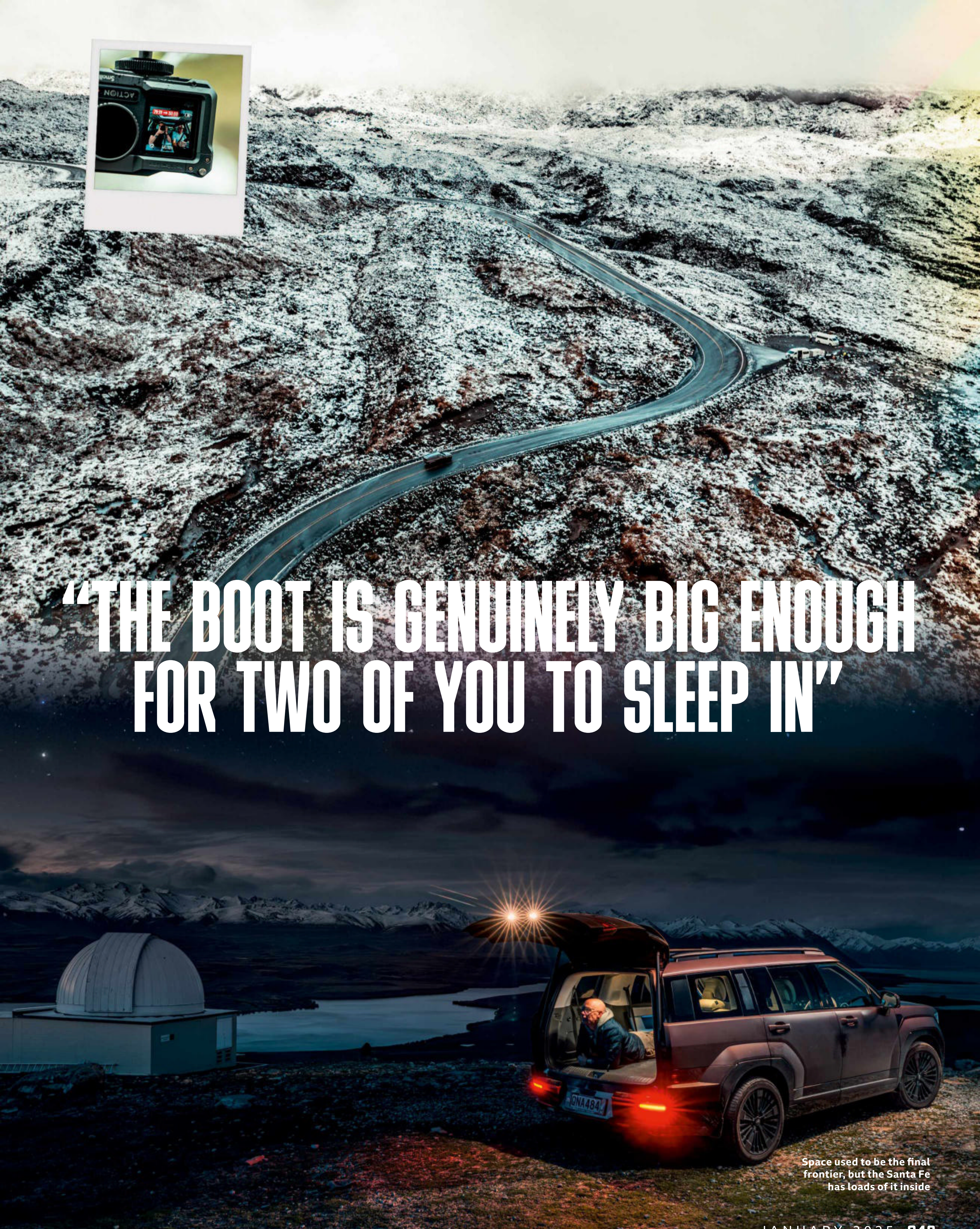
We did tell Ollie there are actual roads in New Zealand, but did he listen?

BULLS
CONST-A-BULL

“Ollie Marriage woz here” – he’s going to get himself thrown out for tagging that

Satnav instructions are very easy round here – in 243 miles, turn right





“THE BOOT IS GENUINELY BIG ENOUGH FOR TWO OF YOU TO SLEEP IN”

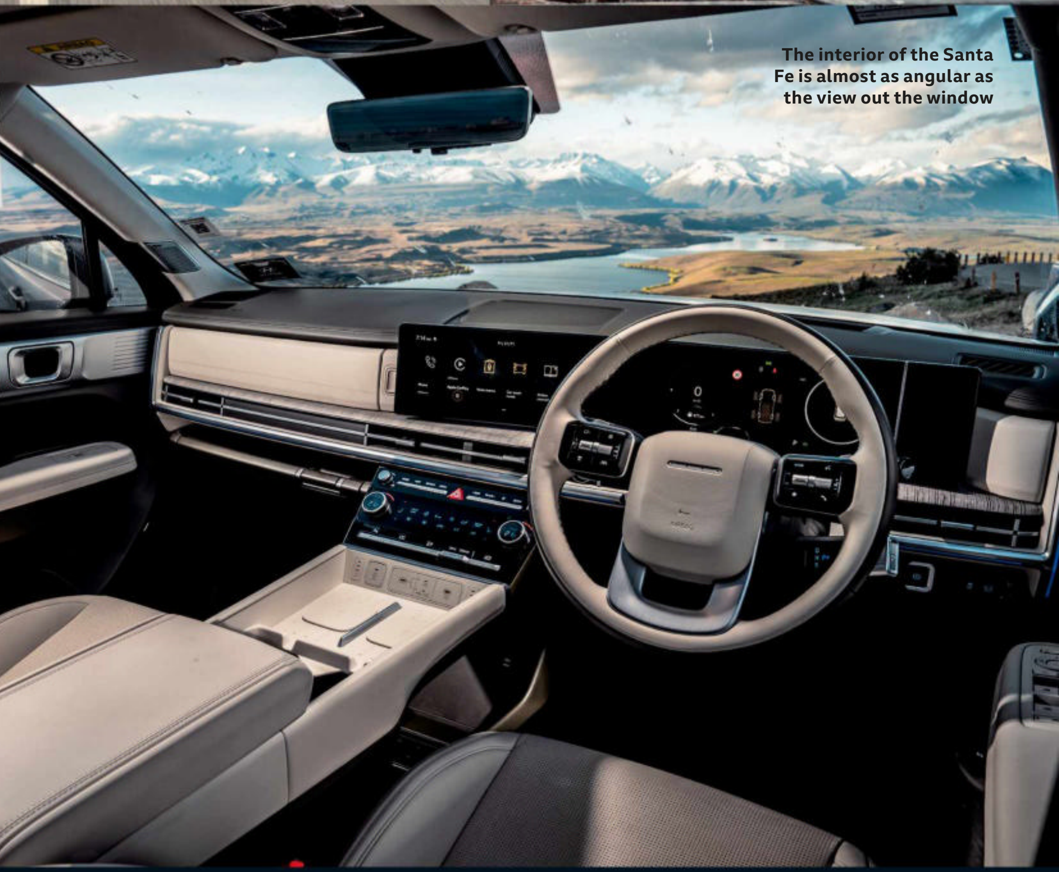
Space used to be the final frontier, but the Santa Fe has loads of it inside

QNA484

SANTA FE
QNA484

There's Santa Fe, Tina Fey and Faye from Steps. Think those are the main ones

Who knew we had actual Hobbits reading the mag? It's an honour

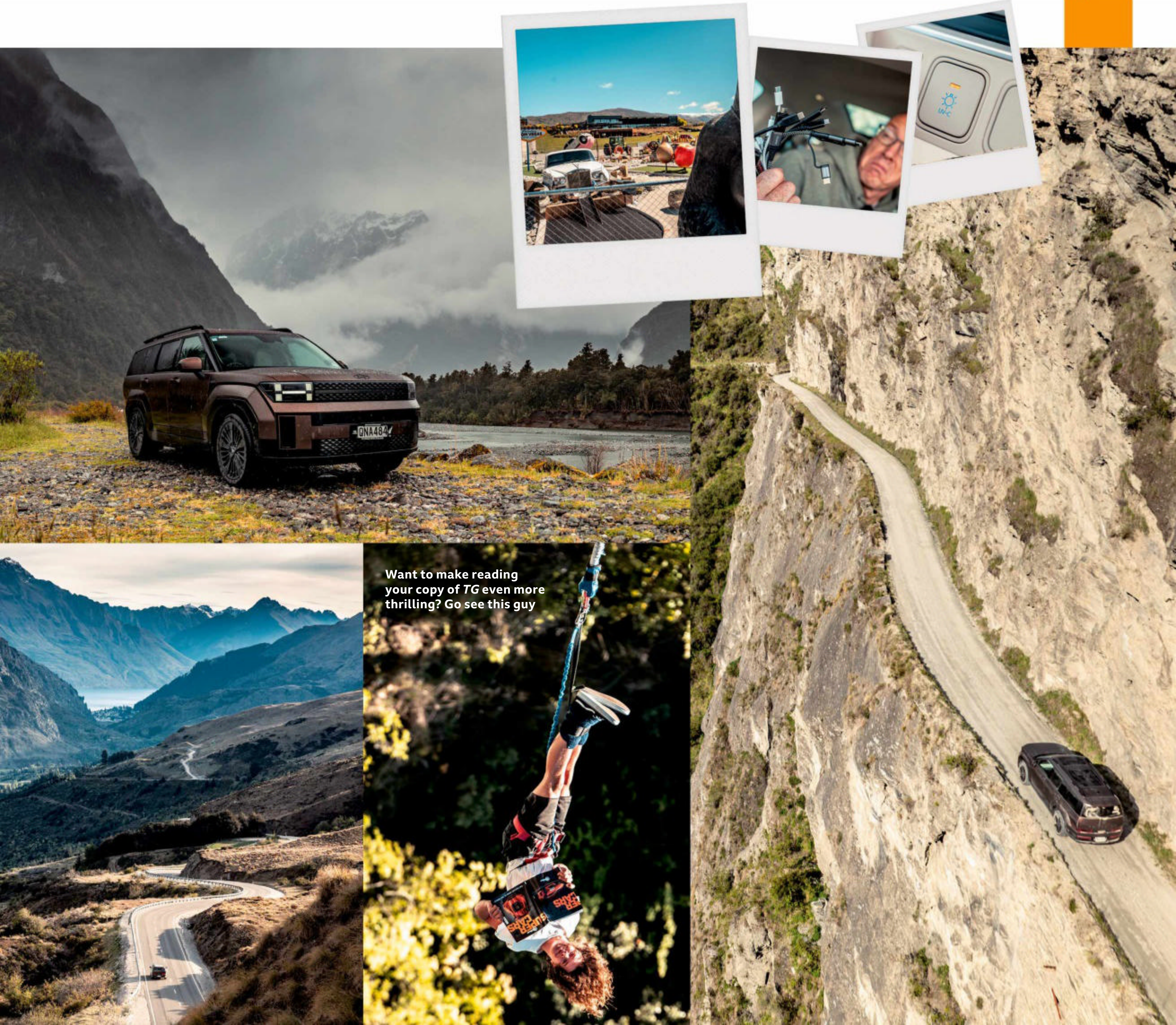


The interior of the Santa Fe is almost as angular as the view out the window and deliver them back to Tekapo, while above us the Milky Way spreads mesmerizingly across the sky.

But that's not the end of the Santa Fe's usefulness. Six well sited USB ports is just about OK (especially if you have the six seat layout with the captain's chairs middle row), but I think I eventually counted 16 separate cupholders. I mean that's got to be enough, right? They're everywhere around this attractively designed, versatile cabin. It's uplifting in here, there's physical buttons, enough tech and tactility to satisfy.

And there are gimmicks. Everyone likes to boast about a world first, and for Hyundai there are two: a largely pointless concealed handle built into the C-pillar to help you pull yourself up to get things from the roof (why when there's a roof rail that already serves exactly that purpose?), and a secondary glovebox that doubles as a UV sterilisation chamber. I'd back a wet wipe to be more effective. But still, it's all evidence that Hyundai thinks deeply about this stuff in a similar way to Skoda or Volvo, and that can only be a good thing.

Dazzling blue lakes dominate this area, none more so than Pukaki, home to surely one of the most incongruous juxtapostions anywhere on the planet as a Soviet-style brutalist power station sits against a backdrop of powder blue water, snow and twinkling mountains. The highest summit here belongs to Aoraki, at 3,724 metres New Zealand's highest point. Here the scenery is open, expansive, you look at the mountains without being among them. The other side of the Lindis Pass the scenery pulls you close and holds you tight. And nowhere closer or tighter than Skippers Canyon. New Zealand's most treacherous road was dug out in the gold mining era and has somehow bypassed all safety protocols since. I've brought the Santa Fe here for two reasons: to find out if it's capable, and if it instils confidence. It's an easy one to answer. Despite projecting a Land Cruiser vibe, it's nothing of the sort underneath: no low ratio box or locking diffs here, just a modestly able off-road mode. Nevertheless you feel confident in it because the view ahead is open and unimpeded, the upright sides make it easy to place, the seats hold you well, the driving position is good. And you're aware of what it's doing.


Want to make reading your copy of *TG* even more thrilling? Go see this guy

Maybe you shouldn't be. The chassis isn't as stiff as you might expect, so when dust gets into the door seals they squeak a bit, and the suspension isn't as well insulated from noise and vibration as it should be. But it's softly sprung and comfortable and never once lets us down. One day it's deep in an off-road canyon, the next tearing round Highlands Motorsport Park in the hands of ex-Hyundai WRC driver Hayden Paddon. I observe from the rearmost seats. Less supportive than the fronts it turns out. The electric is gone within a lap and without it top speed before braking for turn one drops at least 10mph. But the brakes resist fade way better than either of us expected. You tuned in for important family SUV knowledge, right?

No brakes on the rest of this whistlestop tour, which ricocheted from racetrack to the original AJ Hackett bungy jump to put a mag in the hands of AJ Ross and ask him to fall backwards off a bridge and have a read on the way down. We packed in as much as possible, saw and experienced all we could, but the scenery of NZ's emptier island dazzled us. This place, this landscape, the gasp and wonder of it, well, down here at the bottom of the world, God got a bit carried away.

Which meant he didn't have much left when he got to Invercargill. So we elect to meet Steve Muilwyk, our final subscriber (and possibly our most remote, 268 miles distant from the next) at Stirling Point, the most southerly spot on mainland NZ you can drive to. He rolls up in an immaculate i30N, in a finale that looks almost too perfectly choreographed. We take snaps, handover the last of the *TG* goodies and contemplate the drive back north.

It's not been the most conventional test of a family SUV, and the Santa Fe isn't as sophisticated to drive as it is to look at and be in, but I really admire it. It gets right the things it needs to and in terms of design, thoughtfulness and versatility there's not a family car to rival it for the money. And besides it if can handle New Zealand, it'll handle whatever you can put it through.

POST OFFICE • AIR MAIL • NEW ZEALAND

STEVE MUILWYK

SUV OF THE YEAR

> 'THE SCENERY OF NEW ZEALAND'S EMPTIER ISLAND DAZZLED US'

VOLKSWAGEN ID.BUZZ 7-SEAT

You get more folks in a Volks.

Volkswagen's new seven seater ID.Buzz is now the family mover it always should have been

WORDS JACK RIX **PHOTOGRAPHY** JOHN WYCHERLEY

In hindsight, perhaps we were a bit too enthusiastic when the standard ID.Buzz arrived back in spring 2022, anointing it our Electric Car of the Year. We were in raptures about the sunniest piece of design for decades, the nostalgic hugs it handed out as it drove by and the way a van could be an object of desire… and zip along with such frictionless joy. We may have turned a semi-blind eye to the lacklustre range and unimaginative practicality, because we were too busy feeling the peace and love.

We knew a longer wheelbase Buzz was in the pipeline and that it would form the basis of a pure electric California camper (a project that's now been shelved until the end of the 2020s). What we didn't know was that the stretched seven-seat version would be so superior in every department as to render the five seater redundant. The fact you get those extra two seats in the back – big enough for adults, but safe enough for tiddlers with Isofix points as standard – is a big part of it, but you can also order it (at no extra cost) with two individual thrones in the second row with space to walk between them. Alternatively, fold the second row and remove the rearmost chairs to reveal a huge 2,469 litres of furniture gobbling fresh air.

More wheelbase means more battery too, growing from

MPV OF THE YEAR

77kWh to 86kWh on the seven seater, stretching range to a claimed 283 miles (277 on the higher spec Style version here), which realistically means 200 miles at motorway speeds before your anxiety gets the better of you. More power too, as all Buzzes now get VW's new 282bhp rear mounted motor, slashing the 0–62mph time from 10.2 to 7.6 seconds. And you feel it. There's a clarity to the throttle response and an urgency off the line that does a miraculous job of masking the 2.7 tonne kerbweight.

There's more. You now get a little sliding rear window to access fresh air from the back seat, a smart new 12.9-inch infotainment screen which still isn't the last word in glitch free, intuitive interfaces, but it's better, and a powered tailgate and twin electrically operated sliding doors as standard. The latter are endlessly satisfying to pop open from the fob as you struggle towards the car with an armful of school bags. A word of warning, unless you live in a hermetically sealed *Truman Show* dirtless bubble, avoid the white cloth seats.

And we haven't even got to the real kicker yet. All this is only around £510 more than the five-seat version. Finally, the ID.Buzz doesn't just look like an MPV, it acts like one too. Our enthusiasm has been rekindled, and this time it feels like a longer lasting buzz.

CROSSOVER OF THE YEAR

KIA EV3

What are they putting in the soju over at Kia? The Korean firm's been on a roll of late – in 2024 we saw a refresh of its excellent mid-sized EV6, the launch of its supersized, seven-seat (and previously *TopGear* award winning) EV9, and now we have this, the baby brother EV3.

It builds on the EV6's and EV9's many strengths but has the more mainstream buyer in its crosshairs. A mainstream buyer who simply wants an attractive, affordable and adept car to pootle around town and occasionally journey further away in. And here the EV3 ticks all the boxes.

Fresh, vibrant styling that stays the right side of fussy. A classy cocooning cabin that was the perfect antidote to bustling Seoul streets, where we had our first go in one. A widescreen display that's as smart to use as it is to look at. And frankly, it's better to drive than it needs to be. Well weighted controls, smooth power delivery and a comfortable ride add to the serenity, and we found it pretty efficient too, almost matching Kia's claimed 372-mile range.

A starting price of £32,995 is the cherry on top. Crossovers don't come any better because the EV3 has so many bases covered. **PR**

CAR WE'RE MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO DRIVING IN 2025

LAMBORGHINI TEMERARIO

Fair to say excitement was tempered when word hit that the Lambo Huracán's transcendental, naturally aspirated V10 was being retired in favour of… a twin-turbo, *hybrid* V8. One of the car world's greatest ever noises being muffled by a downsized hybrid? Uh oh.

Then came the news of its more 'comfort' focused setup. We began to ask, had Lamborghini forgotten how to… *Lamborghini*?

Of course not. Because it's not just any old hybrid, it's an all new 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8 with three electric motors, able to punch out a startling 907bhp. A fair whack over what the V10 Huracán in Evo guise managed.

And it'll rev to a stratospheric 10,000rpm. *Ten thousand rpm* from a hybrid V8. We're promised an 'immense' noise, and… we can't wait.

Because it'll also have the ability to rattle your very core. Literally. That 'immense' 907bhp V8's flat-plane crank will send full-bore vibrations right through the Temerario's frame.

So you'll hear it. And feel it. And likely be hanging on for dear life because Lamborghini "will not compromise on the sportiness". Roll on 2025. **VP**

Now go and watch the video on topgear.com

PERFORMANCE CAR OF THE YEAR

McLAREN 750S

Seven years ago, a blue twin-turbo V8 McLaren with eye socket headlights and an airbrake turned up to Speed Week and blew away the most talented crop of contenders in a decade. This summer, a blue twin-turbo V8 McLaren with eye socket headlights and an airbrake edged out the strongest final five we'd seen since then, to win it all over again. RIP 720S. Long live the 750S.

Only a third of the parts are new, and not many of them are the top layer, so this new supercar looks the same as the one it replaced. Works for Porsche though. And if this shape had debuted in 2024 we'd still think it was a spaceship. That tells the story of the whole car, in fact. It's a fusion of old school wallop that feels like it's time travelled from the future. Stupefyingly fast, but you could tool around pretending it was a '150S' and still revel in the perfect driving position and visibility, world beating steering feel and freakish easygoing comfort.

You can try to pin down why it works so well: is it the shorter final drive gearing, the hilariously unnecessary power bump, the fact you can now – at last – get a reliable radio signal and Apple CarPlay? Those are the quantifiable on paper improvements. But the 750S still emerges as more than the sum of its parts. So naughtily fast it feels like it ought to be illegal, yet so fluid, talkative and confidence inspiring it knocks every hybrid-drive rival that's appeared since into a cocked hat and emerges as the most exciting daily drivable car ever made. And, for our money, one of the most complete supercars of all time. Well, since the 720S. **OK**

MANUFACTURER OF THE YEAR

Where there were once white goods, Toyota is now awash with characterful, interesting cars – and enticing plans for the future...

WORDS OLLIE MARRIAGE

TOYOTA
K LC 2504

TOYOTA

In 2023 Toyota sold 10.8 million cars globally. It's a behemoth, the world's biggest car company, and that meant last year every tenth new car to roll out of a showroom somewhere in the world wore the famously bland, yet instantly recognisable Toyota logo.

But this award isn't about size or scale, it's about excitement and ambition. That's relatively easy to achieve in a single car, much more difficult to achieve across a range. And being big doesn't necessarily help. Look around at other big brands, look how they're consolidating into a sludgy centre, so risk averse they're building nothing but a series of crossovers.

Toyota has those of course, a series of them with names seemingly picked by a password generator. But look what they're doing around the edges, where the profits are being invested. Into design for a start. When have we ever been able to say that about Toyota? But one look at the Land Cruiser is enough to fall for its chunky charms. That's a car that's been all but dead in the UK for 20 years now and, like the Suzuki Jimny a few years back, has been instantly resuscitated by a facelift. That's all it needed – we know it's bulletproof underneath, will outlive a tortoise and never ever let you down. But now you want one, and you didn't before.

And repeat for the new Prius. The Prius! Remember how that was perceived a decade ago? People loathed it, it was the insipid grey box that turned up to take you home. And now look at it. Smart, daring, desirable. Toyota wasn't going to bring it over to the UK initially but – thank God – it swiftly backtracked. It's one of the most desirable hybrids around.

But cool design isn't the only thing that has set Toyota apart this year. Look at its approach to motorsport. Quietly but consistently it has gone the extra mile – and in so many different categories. OK, this isn't just true of 2024, but from Dakar to WRC and NASCAR to Le Mans to F1 (yes, Toyota recently signed a technical partnership with Haas…) Toyota loves to race. Heck, it has even just announced an Aussie V8 supercar programme that sees the famous 5.0-litre quad cam V8 being shoehorned into a Supra. What's not to love about that?

OK, hardly a big fish. But then you have the GR Yaris. Toyota could have killed it. It had done the job it needed, homologated a super successful WRC car that won five back to back championships from 2019. Instead it's been re-engineered and rejuvenated and remains one of the most relevant and exciting road cars around. Despite the price rise.

Is this a bit rear view? Let's conclude with the FT-Se: Future Toyota – Sports electric. This latter day MR2 is a concept, but in this light, compact sports car we find hope. If it were anyone else, we'd doubt the will or ability to get it into production. Not Toyota. It's the big company that cares about small things.

KING OF THE HILLS

You wait for one 800+bhp super GT, then two rock up at once. It's the Aston/Ferrari showdown we've all been waiting for…

WORDS JETHRO BOVINGDON
PHOTOGRAPHY JONNY FLEETWOOD

VN66 AML
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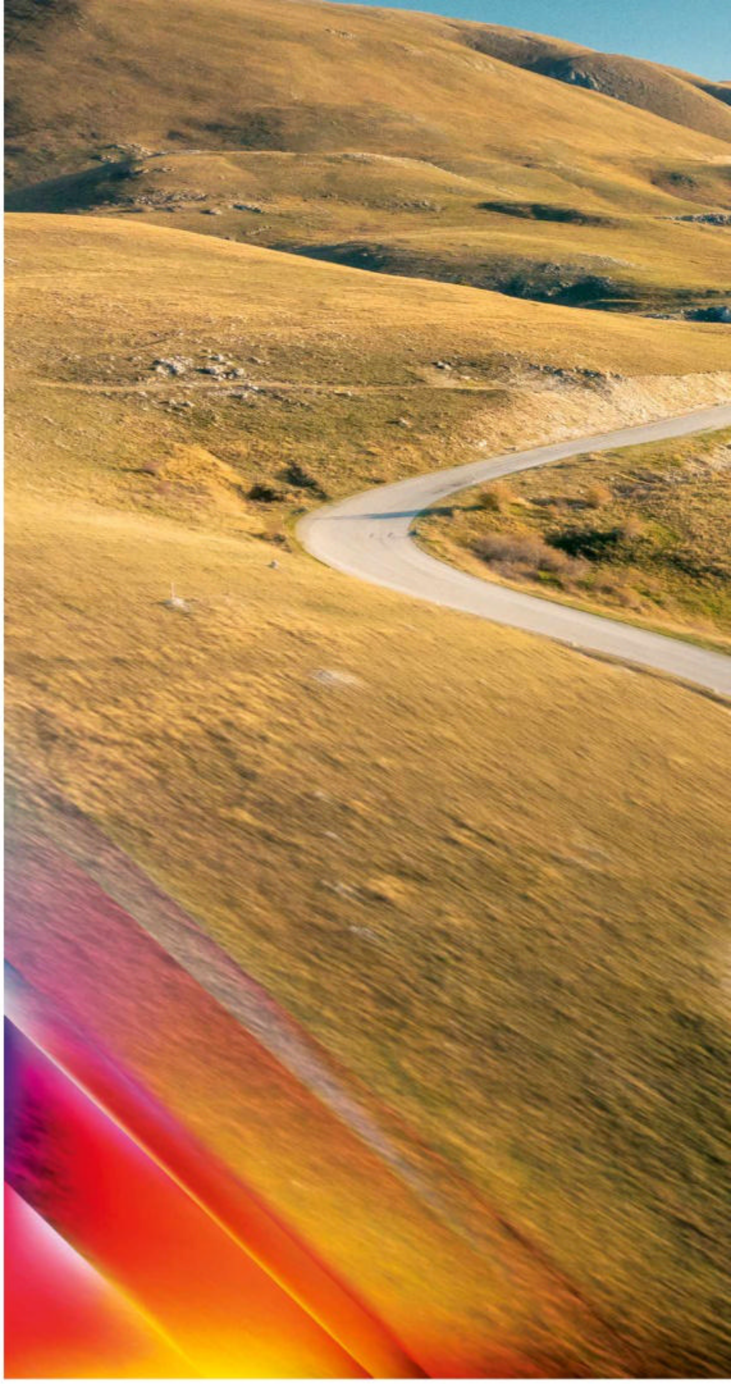


Winter is coming. That's what they say. The doomed tone has grown darker with every passing year. In the quest to reduce emissions there are fines levied, new generations of EVs launched to save us from ourselves and a trail of closed factories. Hot hatches once thrived and now they're an endangered species. Sports cars are built in tiny numbers not because of demand but so as not to hurt fleet average emissions. Supercars have gone hybrid or electric just to survive. And are dying in the process. The cold, bleak outlook is scarier than a White Walker soaring overhead on a freshly reanimated dragon.

And yet today the sun seems warmer than usual. Italy seems even more beautiful. The Gran Sasso massif shimmers and the rolling hills and plains it oversees are lush greens and vivid yellows. The days might be short this time of year, but they are a wonder to behold. Did I mention the roads? Bumpy and weather beaten in places but flowing, varied and wonderfully challenging. Empty, too. Winter can wait. The long summer around these parts is hanging in there.

It's the perfect location for our two protagonists. Cars that have emerged from the deep freeze of Euro 7 requirements and the stuttering march towards an electric future completely unscathed. Here we are looking down the barrel of 2025 with two brand new super GTs, each powered by 12 cylinders in a vee formation, unencumbered by heavy batteries and electric motors and exemplifying the cherished days of excess and indulgence. If they weren't so bloody fast and enthralling I might even pause to shed a tear.

What a grudge match. Aston Martin Vanquish versus Ferrari 12Cilindri. Although, to be honest it doesn't really feel like a contest. As time goes on the idea that cars like this are deadly rivals fades… I imagine Ferrari engineers nodding in appreciation that Aston Martin has developed an all new 5.2-litre twin-turbocharged V12 engine for the Vanquish. Just as I'm sure that Aston's staff look on at the Ferrari's normally aspirated 6.5-litre that revs to 9,500rpm and tip their hats in tribute. Perhaps they compete for the same audience, but to me they're almost brothers in arms. Don't worry, we will choose a winner but my intention is to enjoy these moments rather than just agonise over which one is best.

Living in the moment shouldn't be hard. Just look at these cars. The Vanquish – now with an 80mm longer wheelbase and even more finely sculpted lines – is classically beautiful yet conveys a raw energy. Rarely has elegance looked so, well, horny. It's indecent. The mechanical ingredients promise to match the aesthetic, too. That new engine produces a fulsome 823bhp and 738lb ft, delivered through an eight-speed automatic transaxle with integrated e-diff to the rear wheels. Bespoke new Pirelli tyres are said to focus on ride comfort, noise insulation and traction.

The previous model, the DBS Superleggera, leaned heavily on its traction control and was wickedly overpowered but could also feel

“AS TIME GOES ON THE IDEA THAT CARS LIKE THIS ARE DEADLY RIVALS FADES”

like the chassis wasn’t a match for the engine’s bloodcurdling stonk. So as well as the carefully developed tyres, there’s also a new torque management system which tweaks and tailors the engine’s power curve not only by gear, but also depending on whether you’re in Wet, GT, Sport or Sport+ mode. It costs from £330,000.

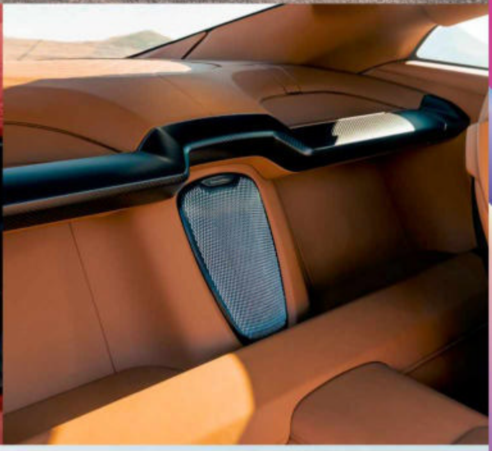
The Ferrari is different. It very definitely channels the untouchable and classical Daytona with the distinctive front light treatment, but the proportion and detailing is more provocative. Less beautiful, certainly. However, the shape does come together in person and on the road it has a retro sci-fi presence that’s hard to resist. Even in Hangover Pee Yellow. Or Giallo Montecarlo as it’s called in Italian.

Pour over the spec sheet and in-depth press kit and the Ferrari continues the sci-fi theme. It has magnetic dampers, Side Slip Control 8.0, an eight-speed dual clutch gearbox and e-diff, Active Torque Shaping, Virtual Short Wheelbase 3.0 (rear wheel steering), ABS-Evo, active aerodynamics and lots more besides. But, of course, all of this is to deploy, enhance and celebrate the main event,

You think it’s a selfie, but he’s actually just spotted a rare bird

By happy accident, Jethro seems to have wandered into a Bob Ross painting

ASTON MARTIN V12



V12 or not, In this scenario cowpower trumps any number of horsepower

ASTON MARTIN
VN66 AML

a 6.5-litre V12 of ferocious potency. The ultimate iteration of the F140 family, which started with the Ferrari Enzo back in 2002, it produces 819bhp at 9,250rpm and 500lb ft at 7,250rpm. The 12Cilindri is a lot. Of everything. Customers will far exceed the starting price of £336,500.

Yet, on first acquaintance Maranello's new dynamic monument to the wonder that is the V12 engine – the bedrock of the entire Ferrari legend – is strangely subdued. We sneak away from the hotel early, trickle through town and have a short blast on the autostrada before heading up towards Gran Sasso. The Ferrari rides rather beautifully and it's so quiet. At UK motorway speeds there's the hum of tyres, a little rush of wind noise around the top of the windscreen but almost no engine noise at all. You'd be hard pressed to guess this car is powered by a V12 in this environment.

No doubt some of this is due to particulate filters and other legislation, but the murmurs that Ferrari has tried to shift this car's character from the wild old ways of the 812 Superfast to a more GT oriented experience are ringing very true. From the ride quality to the calmer steering response, the reduction in aural stimulation to the less rabid power delivery, the 12Cilindri is a different animal to its predecessor. The 812 Superfast was a red-blooded supercar in a refined GT shape. It followed the old ways with its front engine/rear drive layout but was as sharp, uncompromising and wild as anything on four wheels. Perhaps the 12Cilindri will reveal this side later, but I can't pretend I'm not slightly crestfallen that you have to go looking for what was once so vivid and ever present.

On similar roads, the Vanquish is refined, too. It doesn't ride with quite the same grace and it feels a bigger, slightly more intimidating machine. But the Vanquish's direction of travel is the exact opposite of the 12Cilindri's. It's taken a hugely charismatic, monstrously powerful but slightly blunt GT predecessor and honed its responses to deliver a much more supercar sharp driving experience.

The end result is immediately enchanting. The Vanquish has retained the unstoppable force vibe that only the best front engined GT cars can summon but there's very clearly a new edge and a greater clarity to the dynamics. Around town the V12 is ever present – there's ample refinement but the complex, cultured and smooth delivery is unmistakable – and when joining the autostrada the Vanquish sounds thrilling, angry and pure despite having two turbochargers. Picture how you might expect something like a Pagani Utopia to sound. That's the Vanquish. Exotic, expensive and slightly outrageous.

It's a wonderful place to be, too. The Ferrari is simple and has a certain chic elegance to the interior, but its bones still feel more supercar than GT. I love the low scuttle and the way the front wings frame the road. There's a real sense of focus. However, the Aston counters with a much more palpable sense of craftsmanship. The materials are more sumptuous, the detailing more meticulously considered. Plus, the Aston's mix of touchscreen and physical buttons is vastly better than the 12Cilindri's arrangement, which has backed off from the hell of the SF90/296 GTB haptic-only UI with the addition of a central touchscreen, but remains a frustrating compromise. By the time we reach the foothills of the Gran Sasso national park, the Aston is proving irresistible.

This is home territory for the Ferrari, though. Lighter (by a substantial 214kg at 1,560kg dry with lightweight options fitted), more compact, weaponised with that incredibly trick rear wheel steering that works on each side independently and a dizzying array of electronics, this is where Ferrari's super GT effortlessly becomes

There's no smoke without tire, as the old saying goes. Or is it something about smoke and wing mirrors? Anyway, both cars great out of a hairpin

FERRARI 12CILINDRI

Price: £336,500
Powertrain: 6.5-litre nat-asp V12, 819bhp, 500lb ft
Transmission: eight-speed DCT, RWD
Performance: 0–62mph in 2.9secs, 211mph
Weight: 1,560kg (dry)

ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH

Price: £330,000
Powertrain: 5.2-litre twin-turbo V12, 823bhp, 738lb ft
Transmission: eight-speed auto, RWD
Performance: 0–62mph in 3.3secs, 214mph
Weight: 1,774kg (dry)

“THE ASTON HAS A MORE PALP

ABLE SENSE OF CRAFTSMANSHIP"

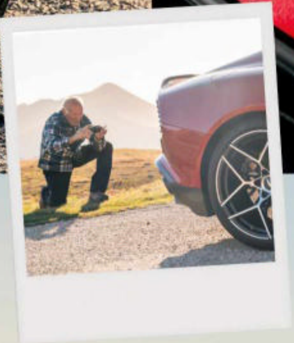
ASTON MARTIN

“WHAT A WAY TO HURTLE THROUGH THIS STUNNING LANDSCAPE”

CASTEL DEL
Montecristo
L'AQUILA
FONTE CERRETO

Good job we've got satnav, this is how that bloke died in *Jurassic Park*

Ferrari
Ferrari



Great view, but if this was England there would at least be a burger van

VN66 AML
GT 951AH

very, very super and leaves Aston's feeling out of its depth. That's the way it's always been.

It is utterly magical. As the road rises, bunches up and then flows across this landscape, the 12Cilindri ups its game. It feels bizarrely small and light, the gearbox is an instrument of absolute precision, and the car manages to feel extremely alert and responsive but still calm and intuitive. It takes a matter of moments to twist the manettino into Race or even CT Off mode, such is the confidence the 12Cilindri breeds. The electronics, coupled to the engine's stunningly accurate and linear power delivery, allow you to revel in the natural balance. You can sense how far back the V12 is pushed in the chassis by the turn-in response and incredible resistance to understeer. There's fantastic traction too, helped by the fact there are no turbochargers giving a huge boost of torque. But, there's still the small matter of 819bhp to play with. Like oversteer? You'll like the 12Cilindri. And you'll love the subtlety of the e-diff and stability and traction control systems. What a way to hurtle through this stunning landscape.

And yet I'm not getting the pure, unbridled joy that I did from the old 812 Superfast. The savagery is missing. The breathless response. The sharp-edged noise and even the eye widening, brain scrambling performance. The 12Cilindri is faster than an 812 Superfast. But it never feels as manic or maniacal. It would be wrong to say that the 12Cilindri has been dumbed down as this is such a high quality, beautifully resolved car. But considering it's named after its engine, there's no question that the V12 is less central to the whole experience than it once was. In pursuing a more rounded proposition, some of the magic has been suppressed.

It's almost as if Aston Martin sensed this opportunity was coming and threw everything at the Vanquish to capitalise. Even so, there are some ways in which the Vanquish is comprehensively beaten by the Ferrari. The eight-speed gearbox, for example, is a very good auto box. But it feels treacly compared with the Ferrari's razor sharp dual clutch. The brakes have a longer travel and offer less consistency than the 12Cilindri's, and the big Aston doesn't quite match the outright agility of the deft Ferrari.

Now go and watch the video on **topgear.com**

"EXPLORING ITS OUTER LIMIT IS A THING TO RELISH AND FEAR EQUALLY"

Yet none of it matters. The Aston is outrageous. Unstoppable. Its 5.2-litre twin-turbocharged engine has phenomenal response and torque, but also builds to a fearsome crescendo. The Vanquish is so fast that you don't just mindlessly pin the throttle. Ever. You squeeze it, mete out the performance as best you can and, occasionally, dare yourself to actually reach for the rev limiter. Very few cars feel this rampant and yet the sheer straight line theatre is matched by a chassis blessed with remarkable traction and balance. The killer factor over the Ferrari is that the Vanquish has just the right amount of edge to make exploring its outer limits a thing to relish and fear in equal measure. It's mannered but not tamed or sanitised.

On these spectacular roads the suspension is at its best in the middle setting, everything else ramped up to Sport+. Disable the stability control and you unlock an adjustable traction control system that works like a volume control for wheel slip. It defaults to 5 and you can turn it down for more intervention, or dial it up for more excitement. Levels 7 and 8 still attempt to refine your inputs but allow enough slip for tyre smoke. One more click and you're on your own. I would recommend it. But only after a long period of acclimatisation and – if you're really lucky – the certain knowledge that this isn't your car or your Pirellis.

Driven unshackled, the Vanquish is quite an extraordinary thing. It doesn't shrink like the Ferrari but its character and venomous performance make it grow in stature. It's an odd feeling. You're intimately involved in the process of making the Vanquish move but also get to look on in awed wonder. Swept along by the performance on offer, agog that you can hustle and cajole a car this big and powerful with such economy of movement and stunned that its poise remains even under the most intense scrutiny. It's phenomenal. Truly. A car built around the virtues of a V12 engine but determined to do so much more than pay homage to tradition. It is more of an event than the Ferrari. More alive. More joyous. More optimistic. It's also a landmark for Aston Martin. Let's hope this is the start of a long, hot summer for this often troubled company.

SUPER GT OF THE YEAR

ASTON MARTIN
VN66 AML

PERFORMANCE SUV OF THE YEAR

PORSCHE MACAN

Porsche making a decent fist of an electric Macan really isn't that much of a surprise, but there's a subtlety and ease of execution here that makes it a confident class leader.

It has luxury car levels of urban comfort to oil you through the commute – especially on air sprung versions – and then genuine sharpened canines and Porsche precision when you find yourself on a decent road.

It's not a 911, but then it's not supposed to be. What it is, is still a Porsche – heavy 100kWh EV drivetrain and practical shape be damned. The most notable part is really that when other mid-sized electric SUVs are busy running out of dynamic ideas bar the initial rush to 62mph, the Macan steps up. Deliciously accurate steering, consummate body control, velcro grip. OK, the Turbo is so fast you'll be more worried about your wilting licence than hitting an apex, but among the models there'll be a less rabid, range enhanced sweetspot that suits.

If you want an electric daily that requires no justification, a sports electric family car, it's this one. **TF**

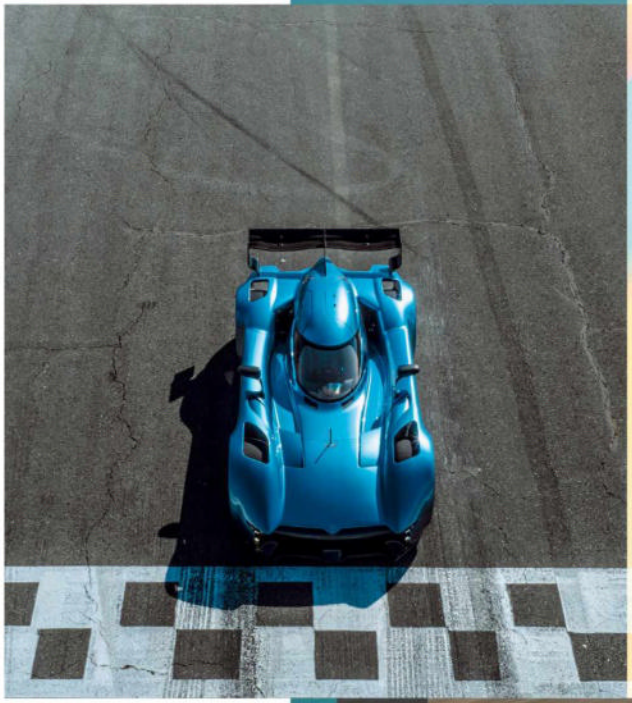
TRACK WEAPON OF THE YEAR

McMURTRY SPÉIRLING

I'd come back in between stints and was about to experience max attack, 23,000rpm fan, 3*g* cornering, 1,000bhp shove for the first time. Thomas Yates, McMurtry's CEO, sidled up to me, "Now let's see if we can pull your head off your shoulders." Hardly words of reassurance, but actually they just made me chuckle. "Yeah, let's have it," I thought.

Because even now, months later, I can remember exactly how the Spéirling made me feel – it made me feel like a superhero. Because it's so small, so low, so narrow, because it instils confidence and because you sit centrally with the wheels hemming you in, you wear the Spéirling like a cape. And suddenly you're not a puny mortal any more, but have a level of ability way, way beyond anything else you might ever come up against.

We look at the recently announced F80 and W1 and see the incremental gains in speed and lap time, but on their trajectory it'll take them decades to get to the Spéirling's level of performance. So don't think of this as a car. Think of this as a shortcut to the future. **OM**



VOLVO EX90

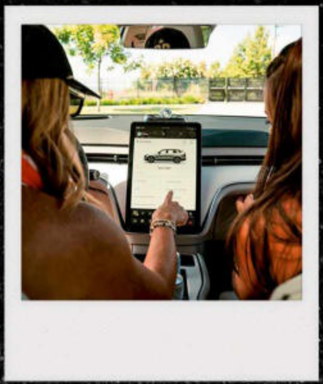
LUXURY FAMILY CAR OF THE YEAR

Let's look at luxury in a different way. Because it's not always about leather, wood, exclusivity and snobbery. Consider: what is luxury if you have a family? It's not open pore veneers and intricately stitched cow hide... it's about what makes travel easy, how you make life onboard as relaxing as possible.

I'm not sure I've ever come across a car that better caters to all occupants than the Volvo EX90. It combines the benefits of electric power with genuinely thoughtful cabin design. Until now they haven't been combined – we've had smooth driving family EVs such as the Audi e-tron, and a long legacy of clever family cars that stretches back to the Renault Espace. But every other firm has been so busy getting its big electric box out the door that it did no more than provide reasonable space inside.

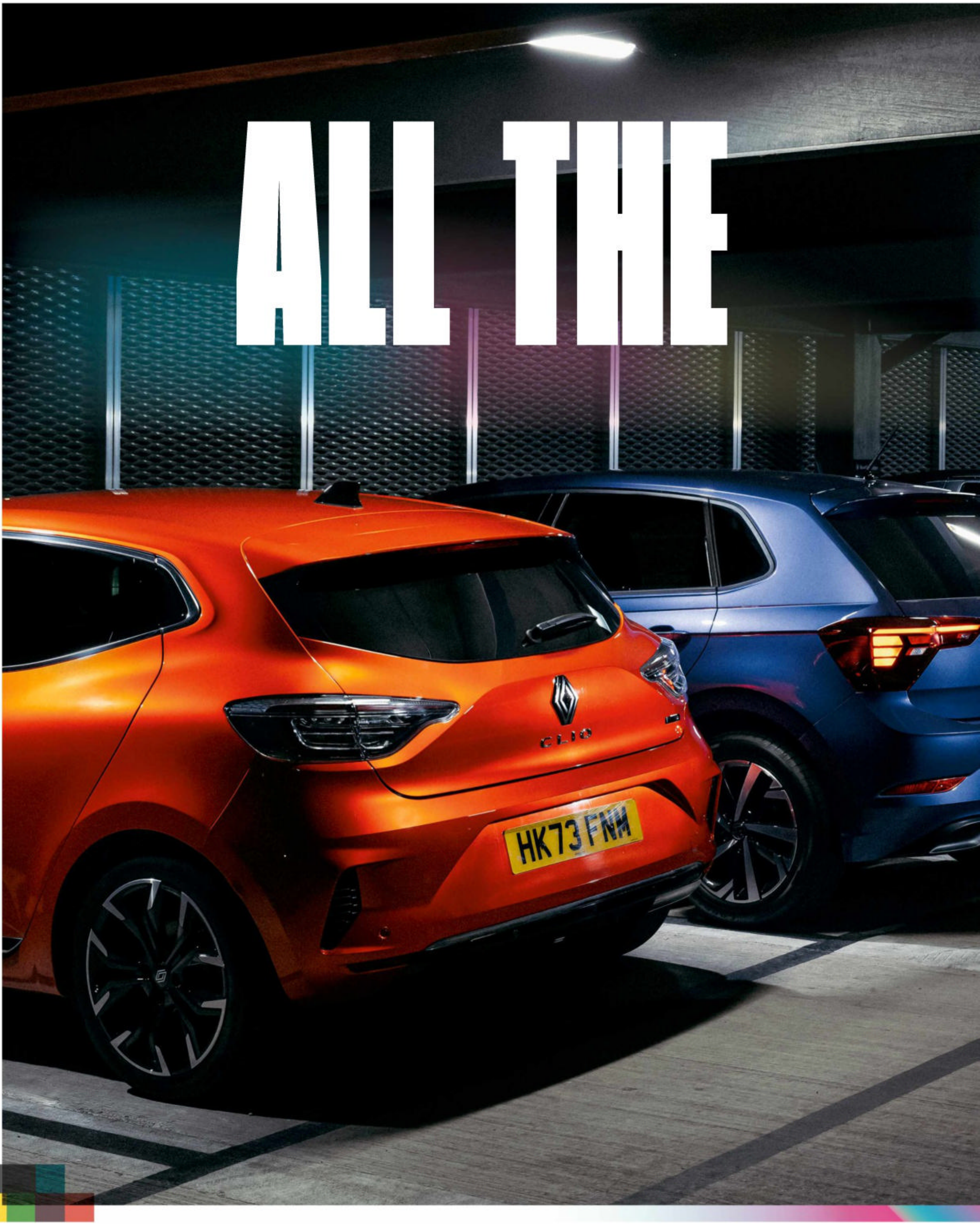
Incidentally, electric power is the right thing for families. It's easier to manage. Yet even among electric cars the EX90 is so smooth, so quiet, so effortless that driving it doesn't occupy you, making it easier to deal with the bag of crisps that's just exploded across the back seats.

Now the practicality. To be honest, it doesn't do much more than an XC90 has been doing for over 20 years, but this is Volvo's patch, it understands how important it is that kids can slide their seats forward, that there are built-in booster seats, that clever packaging is worth investing in. So it has. Apart from cupholders. Not enough, too small. That's it though. The grit in the oyster. The price you pay for the pearl. **OM**



Now go and watch the video on *topgear.com*

ALL THE


CLIO
HK73 FNM

SMALL THINGS

SMALL CAR OF THE YEAR

Word is there's no such thing as a decent, small, simple, reasonably priced car these days. Allow *TopGear* to investigate

WORDS OLLIE KEW **PHOTOGRAPHY** OLGUN KORDAL

THE FIESTA IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE... WELL, LET'S FIND OUT.

Ford's definitive, generation spanning supermini casts a shadow tonight, but doom mongering reports suggest more household names won't survive the end of the decade. Time to swim in the current small car talent pool.

Instead of slavishly matching up bang-on rivals, we've amassed an eclectic mixture to give you the broadest possible picture of what's out there: from the brand new through the recently facelifted to established favourites. The bargain basement, the normcore, the Taste the Difference premium. There are manuals and autos, hybrids and turbos. And prices spanning a 10 grand spread. If (like me) these cars are 'about 12 grand' in your head, it's time to recalibrate.

I'm drawn to the **Clio**, because it's another stalwart badge and gorgeous. I question the wisdom of festooning the front corners with extra lights – this is targeted at both extremes of the customer spectrum not famed for parking accurately – but the tapered nose, glittering grille and swollen flanks easily win Renault the beauty tiara.

Inside the winning smile fades. Like the Mini, this is essentially a heavy facelift of a car that's been around for over a decade, and this Clio platform has always felt cramped. The jutting centre console modelled on Pride Rock from *The Lion King* is just as unyielding. Could do with some soft touch padding to reduce the impact swelling on your left knee. The instrument and centre screen graphics are clear but dated and Renault still chooses where its media and cruise control switchgear lives by loading it into an NBA T-shirt cannon.

Money has instead been spent under the bonnet, on the 'e-Tech' hybrid system which Renault fervently claims distils learnings from its F1 powertrain. Yes, the one it's just cancelled. It might not win on Sunday but this deserves to sell every day of the week. Wish I could tell you what the 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine is like but in truth we barely met, so keen is the Renault to run as an EV. Handover between the two power sources is smooth, it's nippy in hybrid mode and we averaged over 60mpg. The grit in your oyster here is the rock solid brake pedal, also apparently from a single seater. Canny way to avoid moaning about wavering hybrid brake feel, by removing it entirely.

Still, the Clio rudely exposes the established hybrid mini and Official Car of Pensioners 1999–2024, the **Yaris**. Keen to escape the Stannah Stairlift image, Toyota applied lashings of GR Sport body kit, nicely bolstered seats and annoyingly stiffened suspension. Add on the spindly 18-inch rims and the Yaris hobbles itself as a town car, crashing over potholes, tram lines and drains like the tyres are made of MDF. Save £6k with the boggo chassis and you'll find the e-CVT hooks up better than the tired Prius that mooed you home from the Christmas party... but nothing like as slickly as the equally economical (but less roomy) Clio.

I stroll off in the direction of the Mini Cooper C but Greg Potts reminds me the Cadbury coloured **Polo** hasn't been left by a night duty nurse and is in fact here for review. Anonymous, isn't it? And meanly specced with candle power halogen headlamps compared with everyone else's LEDs, it looks even more dated.

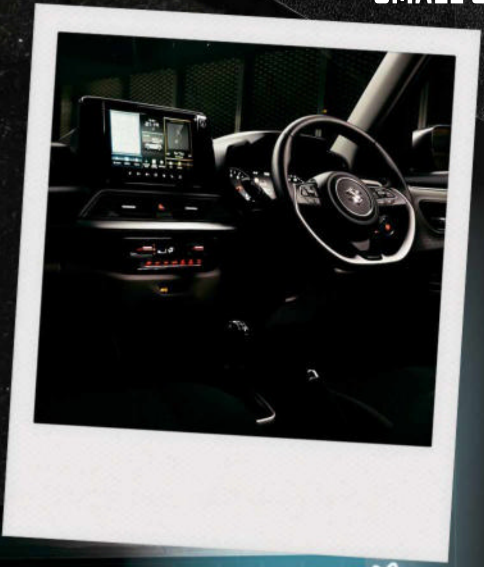
Settling inside is a happier tale because the Polo (on sale since 2017) remembers a time before Volkswagen binned all common sense and premium aspirations with interiors. It feels solid and grown up, even if the touch sensitive climate control panel is a pain and the digital dials needlessly complicated.

That mini-Golf stodginess suits it on the road: it's... well, solid and grown up. It rides quietly and though lacking any electric boost, the only car here to crack this year's top 10 bestsellers is a homely, reassuring companion. But just so dreary. And none of us can figure out why you wouldn't buy a Skoda Fabia for a grand less, which makes the same chunky door closing 'whumph' noise.

Volkswagen tickled up the price of this Polo by a whopping £3k adding stuff that ought to be standard, like floor mats and foglights. To Mini those are rookie numbers: a Cooper C equipped with the sweet 1.5-litre 3cyl turbo starts life £300 cheaper than the Polo Match, until Mini fleeces you a mighty £5,000 in option packs. Don't be seduced by the standard heated steering wheel and automatic gearbox. You have to shell out extra for a head-up display to project your speed where you can safely see it.

In price and performance the **Mini** is the Bugatti Chiron of this test, racing to 62mph in under eight seconds making a cheery, chirrupy noise and carving corners with much more trademark vigour than our *TG* Garage Cooper S, which carries an extra 25kg in its bulldog nose. It's still the heaviest car here by a chunk but you'd never guess it, apart from at the pumps – 45mpg is your realistic average.

So the Mini does... what Minis do and always have: looks cute, coochy coo cabin, ace to chuck around, fab fit and finish. But essentially a two-seater, with a clutch purse boot. Like feeling ripped off while having your shins crushed? Fly Ryanair.



Reverse synchronised J-turn, a crucial part of the *TG* test criteria

Mini's cheery cabin spoiled by the world's thickest steering wheel

Swift tries its best to live up to its name, but the MG is having none of it

There's lazy parking, and then there's this motley crew. Someone have a word

YB24 HYL
KR24 XUU
HK73 FNM
LC24 YKJ

If price is your chief criteria no wonder the **MG3** is grinning manically like Gotham's Joker. In addition to its weird creases and hideous gurning mug you get a reasonably roomy, hugely equipped hybrid supermini for less than £18,500.

Even here in kitted out top spec Trophy guise, it's barely north of £20k, which appears phenomenal value when a glance at the spec reveals its wealth of equipment is tugged along by almost 200 horses. Chinese cavalry don't have much sense of direction though, getting lost between the hybrid 1.5-litre thrasher and the tyres, sometimes bolting unexpectedly only to be wasted as wheelspin.

Everyone on the team agreed it also fell the miserable side of the cheap 'n' cheerful fence. Some of the buttons are so grim to use I presumed they'd been broken and hastily superglued in place, and as the only contender with no heater switchgear and confused touchscreen logic, it's not user friendly for driver or passenger.

Nothing's perfect so far. And neither is the Suzuki **Swift**, which has been an uncommonly handsome supermini for 20 years until whoever designed this new one used a beluga whale for facial inspiration and forgot the other three sides altogether. The interior has fewer soft touch impressions than Roy Keane's punditry and you need to be a bomb, sorry, *bong* disposal specialist to figure out how to disable the anti-speeding alert.

But that aside there's a refreshingly simple 'hire car in sunny Majorca' vibe here that's charmingly endearing. The only car here with proper, unfussy dials for speed and revs. A delectably sweet five-speed gearshift. The Swift musters just 81bhp and sluggish urgency as a result but it feels so agile and alert (like the Mini) because it's so incredibly light: less than a tonne despite plenty of equipment (like the MG) and class leading onboard space. It holds its drink as well as it holds an apex, and yet rides with a mature, soft edged, spongy fluency (like the Polo). The best of all worlds.

Then you look at the bottom line and see it's the second cheapest car here, even in laden Ultra trim. Cheap to buy, cheap to run, fun to drive, unpretentious, comfortable, practical and likeable. Isn't that all you could want from a small car?

WINNER

SUZUKI SWIFT ULTRA
£20,299 / £21,149 as tested
81bhp, 64.2mpg

RENAULT CLIO E-TECH TECHNO
£23,295 / £23,995 as tested
143bhp, 65.7mpg

VW POLO MATCH
£22,605 / £25,745 as tested
94bhp, 54.1mpg

TOYOTA YARIS GR SPORT
£28,815 / £29,420 as tested
129bhp, 67.2mpg

MG3 HYBRID+ TROPHY
£20,495 / £21,040 as tested
192bhp, 64mpg

MINI COOPER C
£22,300 / £27,399 as tested
152bhp, 47.1mpg

WORDS PAUL HORRELL

IT'S BEEN a GOOD YEAR

This has been a great year to get an **electric car** despite – no, because of – the scare stories. The sparseness of buyers forced deep discounts on new and secondhand. Plus **charge point** numbers rose faster than the number of EVs, **erasing range anxiety**.

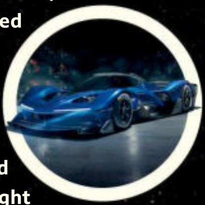
RANGE ANXIETY

The quality of EVs keeps going up but best of all so does their variety: **Dacia's** and **Citroen's** cheery cheapies, the gorgeous attainable **R5**, hottish hatches from **Cupra** and **Mini**, estates by **BMW** and **VW**, and even a scissor doored two-seat convertible by **MG**.

Swoop now, because these discounts can't last. The industry has needed to sell the cars because governments (old and current) mandated it to, but no one is mandated to buy. So it's all pretty unstable.

A great year too at the opposite end, hypercars. The **Ferrari F80** and **McLaren W1** make a fascinating pair. The W1 is all new but has essentially the same powertrain scheme as papa P1 – a twin-turbo V8 and plug-in hybrid boost with rear drive lairiness. Whereas Ferrari has taken a radical technical swerve from the LaFerrari by adding a pair of torque-vectored front motors, and Grand Prix-style MGU-H electric turbos. Controversially they're hung onto a V6 not a V12. But then, this is in principle the system that won Le Mans.

Even though **Adrian Newey** is departing the F1 team, Red Bull Advanced Technologies let him finish his hypercar masterpiece. The **RB17** is all about the air. Newey unshackled himself from the tight Formula One design rules, and from the road car rules too. Does freedom make it easy, or hard? Given the nature of the man, I think we can assume the latter.



Bugatti doesn't race, so with the Tourbillon it has done what those others chose not to or couldn't do, going all in on sight and sound and tactility for their own sake. Who needs a V16 engine? But who wants one? Exactly.

IT'S BEEN a BAD YEAR

Even **Tesla's** bosses would say it had a *mixed* year, quite apart from evidence Musk's tweeting is turning away more customers than it attracts, at least on this side of the Atlantic. Yes the Cybertruck got to customers' hands in numbers, but the Roadster was effectively cancelled.

The Robotaxi remains vapourware and will likely be beaten to the streets by Verne, a project from Rimac, which is better at meeting its promises.

Mind you **autonomous driving** had another bad year. Even to its proponents, it keeps getting pushed back. I gave up asking when it'll arrive, because car company people won't commit. Instead I asked one of Nissan's engineers – always a cheerleader for the idea – if it's getting closer or further away… and he just wouldn't commit. In Abu Dhabi there was an actual race of autonomous cars, **A2RL**. A huge technical achievement that they could get round the track at all, but it was a tedious race. And our Stig beat their lap time.

Fisker went bang. It was the ageless saga of a new manufacturer underestimating the difficulty of releasing a finished car. So Fisker released an unfinished one in a failed bid to get enough revenue to right itself. No Saabs have been sold for 13 years but there's still independent spares support. Will **software defined EVs** have that lifetime after their makers have gone?

Jaguar didn't die, it's just being put into cryogenic suspension. All the current range has gone, ready for the brand to return in 2026 with bigger, faster, more luxurious cars for the lucky fewer. Some of those dying cars were decent in their day, but they didn't sell because too few people liked the brand. Will 'new Jaguar' work, or would it be better to just invent a new name?

Best newcomer

CHINA

We've sneered for years at copycat designs, kooky cars and shoddy quality, but the main Chinese takeaway in the last year has been our money, for increasingly competitive cars.

Biggest moment

LEWIS TO FERRARI

Ferrari announced its F1 coup in a snappy 20-word release ahead of the 2024 season, snaffling Sir Lewis to everyone's surprise – including current Ferrari man Carlos Sainz, who was left scrabbling to find a seat for 2025. The question now remains – will Lewis do a Michael Schumacher and bring success back to Maranello, or a Nigel Mansell and leave in a huff?

Most endangered

FIAT PANDA

The original Panda was in production for 23 years, making the third gen's 12 and counting look tame. Still, we're shedding a tear for the little rascal being replaced by a lardy Citroen C3 based electric version. The Panda's off sale in the UK and dealers are running low – it'll be available on the continent for years yet, but the RHD Panda is now an endangered species.

Moonshot event

A2RL'S FIRST RACE

Motorsport fans were gagging for the first round of the AI piloted A2RL series in April. Then the first race was canned when the hapless machines stopped on track in a line behind a stalled rival car.

Best U-turn

SKODA'S KNOBS

We can understand why carmakers are ditching the buttons, but it doesn't mean we have to like it. So well done Skoda for seeing sense with its new multipurpose button-slash-dial things.

Best recall

BMW

BMW shares dunked to a four-year low in September following a massive brake related recall that's turned out to be worse than first thought. The German company is having to fix 1.5m cars built since June 2022 with a faulty component supplied by Continental, ranging from the X1 SUV through to Minis and even the Rolls Spectre. It's set to cost almost £800m to sort.

RACE FOR GLORY

Best bad movie

RACE FOR GLORY

This retelling of the 1983 WRC fight is under the radar on Netflix, and it feels like it could've been made at any point in the past two decades. Vague knowledge of the facts will have you lobbing your fake moustache and cigs at the screen. But this diverting nonsense hits the spot, as Riccardio Scamarcio mugs off Daniel Brühl's certified villain, Audi boss Roland Gumpert.

Most viral

TOURBILLON SCREEN

Forget the Bugatti Tourbillon's V16 or its mooted 277mph top speed – over 10 million people on the *TG* Instagram watched its screen unfold out of the dash. Worth the £3.1m alone, probably.

MISCELLANEOUS

Other stuff we've liked this year. Or not

WORDS
SAM BURNETT

WALL OF FAMERS

TG's People of the Year – honours come no higher

MAXIMILLIAN MISSONI

VP design midsize & luxury, BMW

We won't see his BMWs for a while, but we're happy he got the job this year. Design of BMW's big cars has been spiralling down. So-called 'presence' and 'distinction' had steamrollered elegance and stance.

Missoni's previous job was at Polestar. He did the 3 crossover, the 4 crossover coupe and the upcoming 5 saloon. All have a notable design finesse. None look like anyone else's cars. Given he'd set Polestar on a course for years to come – assuming it *has* years to come – and you can see why he was ready for a move.

Few challenges in design will be more scrutinised than the one he's embarked on. Except that of BMW Group design chief, a role for which he's now pole sitter once Adrian Van Hooydonk retires. **PH**

THE STIG

Racing driver

Don't you have to be a 'person' to be on *TG*'s people of the year roster? We'll sweep that under the carpet for now because The Stig has earned a place. With no TV show to play with for now, we've been keeping him dusted down and doing his favourite thing – driving fast cars… fastly.

He's piloted a collection of the world's noisiest flat out along a subterranean test track, all for the benefit of our ears. He's wrestled monsters – Valkyrie, Jesko and the 2,000bhp Transit Supervan – for a new series of *Stig Laps* and taken Tom Ford for the UK's longest Uber. He's even saved us from driverless racecars by beating an autonomous racer into submission around Yas Marina. It's a tough job, but ~~somebody~~ something has to do it. **JR**

STELLA LI

Executive vice president, BYD

Li joined BYD in 1996, when it was a little outfit making phone batteries. She's now responsible for overseas operations of a company that's out-engineering and outselling Tesla.

"I tell my people we're not here to sell a car. We're a tech company, one that's changing the world." Brand building is the priority, because she says most people who try the cars buy one. Dynamics and stuff *TG* obsesses on are old hat. It's about electric drive and batteries, and integration in a buyer's digital life.

Li is making BYD European, with R&D and vast factories in Hungary and Turkey capable of making at least 20 PHEV and EV models, ready to outsell, say, Nissan in Europe by about 2028. Don't bet against her. **PH**

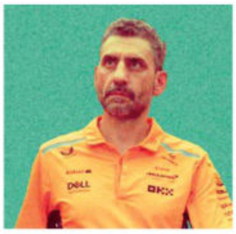
GILLES LE BORGNE

Advisor to the CEO, Renault

A chief engineer has two main jobs. Come up with cars people want, that's number one. And making those cars at efficient cost, so people can afford them while the company makes enough money to survive. That's number one as well.

Gilles Le Borgne is a master of both. As chief engineer at Renault Group he got the 5 out the door, a car lovelier than its price says it should be. Dacia is his remit too, and he's made the amazingly cheap Duster and Bigster that are also pretty wantable.

This summer he tried to retire, but they asked him to stay on as advisor. By the way, for a decade up to 2019 he did much the same at Peugeot-Citroen, an era when Peugeot improved and Citroen got more interesting and better value. **PH**



ANDREA STELLA

Team principal, McLaren F1 Team

When Andrea Stella was named as team principal back in December 2022, McLaren was treading water. Better than when it plumbed to the depths of P9 in the constructors', but not great. And 2023 was looking like another trip to oblivion: McLaren screwed up its winter development and you'd have found better aero on the Black Pearl.

Enter Captain Stella. He hastily instigated (yet another) internal review, restructuring the team and kickstarting performance. Only this time… it worked. This year, McLaren is a team transformed, having caught and sunk the mighty Red Bull outfit that won 22 of 23 races last season. It's now on the brink of its first constructors' title in 26 years. All because of Stella's inspired leadership. **JH**

SPACEX

TG TECH AWARD

A ticket to Mars just got a whole lot closer, thanks to the mind-blowing genius of the scientists at SpaceX and their reusable spaceship tech

WORDS ROWAN HORNCASTLE **PHOTOGRAPHY** COSMICBACKGROUND.IO

Ever had someone toss a bottle of beer and you caught it first try? Feels good, doesn't it? Now imagine that bottle of beer was tossed from space, is the size of Big Ben, weighs as much as 1,000 elephants, and is coming at you at 17,000mph. And you've got to catch it... using a pair of chopsticks. First. Try.

That's what Elon Musk and his team of big brained boffins at SpaceX achieved on 13 October to bag *TopGear*'s Tech Award.

On its fifth test flight, SpaceX made history. Having lit a substantial mixture of icy cold liquid methane and liquid oxygen fuel (known as methalox) SpaceX's Super Heavy booster's 33 Raptor engines got what can only be described as an almighty stonk on, generating around 74 meganewtons of thrust to get the world's largest flying object airborne. To put that into perspective, it's almost 700 times as powerful as the shove generated by a normal passenger plane and twice as powerful as the Saturn V rocket – the first firework to take humanity to the moon.

After a successful lift-off, ascent, stage separation, boost back burn and coast, the main event – and a step into the rather large unknown – arrived. Unlike in previous flights, when the Super Heavy booster (the skyscraper sized lower part of the Starship rocket) would fall away, on this occasion it relit three of its engines and slowed itself down, descending gently back toward 'Mechazilla' (the even bigger skyscraper sized structure and launch pad), where, after a flurry of fire and a symphony of sonic booms, a pair of giant mechanical arms caught it. It's a brain meltingly impressive achievement.

In fact, I'm pretty sure if this had been suggested before, there would've been a conga line of white coated scientists carrying the person responsible to a padded cell. But for Elon Musk, 'impossible' isn't a word that registers in his head.

As you may know, Musk wants to make interplanetary travel a reality. A reusable spacecraft is key to this, as no one wants to land on Mars and then realise the ship they arrived in is a one way ticket. This mission took everyone one step closer. Musk wants a spaceship that can be used more like a charter plane than a traditional rocket system, able to land, refuel, and take off again a few hours after landing. We're now closer to that.

SpaceX is pushing the boundaries of reusability with this kind of precision engineering. Catching the booster directly on its launch mount shaves crucial hours of time – no need to fish it out of the ocean or sail it back on a drone ship. No, this big beauty lands right where it started.

Before you start to pack your bags for the red planet, bear in mind we're still a few test flights away from launching people into the void. But make no mistake – SpaceX is making giant leaps (and the occasional cartwheel) forward. And, whether the rockets crash in a blaze of glory or land with the grace of a gymnast, it's utterly riveting to watch. So, go to YouTube and watch this launch immediately. It's seven minutes you'll never forget. Possibly for the rest of your life. **RH**

MEANWHILE... IN THE

March Church
POLICE
2A
Metropolis
Human
Loading
Zone

FUTURE

Catching rockets with chopsticks isn't the only autonomous tech going on in Elon Musk's world...

WORDS JACK RIX
PHOTOGRAPHY HARRY RUDD

I've just been served a draught mocktail from a suspiciously slick talking robot in a pinny, squeezed past a long queue for the 'church of merch' and hitched a ride in a taxi without wheel or pedals down MDF streets of wild west saloons and Manhattan apartment blocks. I'm half expecting to wake up any second in a pool of sweat. Instead, the hallucination continues – I strike up a conversation with a dad dancing humanoid robot, it tells me a joke, I wonder why they've uploaded the personality of Ned Flanders. I bump into YouTuber and *TG* contributor Marques Brownlee, hoping for a crumb of normality. "This is definitely their most chaotic event," he confirms. "Oh look, there's an inflatable dinosaur in the back of a Cybertruck."

Technically we're at the Warner Bros studio lot for the launch of Tesla's Robotaxi, really we're participating in a dress rehearsal for Elon Musk's autonomously driven, robot assisted vision of our future. He leaps onto the stage, stumbles through a script, occasionally answering questions yelled out by the audience, and proceeds to paint a picture of a world where we get all the dead time spent driving back to do whatever is it we like to do. Where car parks become green spaces, crashes become few and far between, every home has an Optimus 'buddy' to do the chores and where running a small fleet of Cybercabs becomes a lucrative hustle. He goes on to claim it'll be in production by 2026 and cost from under $30,000. He also shows an autonomous 20-seater Robovan that looks like an unhitched Airstream trailer, and has *iRobot* director Alex Proyas reaching for his lawyer's phone number. It's a lot.

The Robotaxi (or Cybercab – "Call it what you like", Tesla design chief Franz von Holzhausen tells us) looks a lot like the VW XL1 (remember that?), has just two seats, butterfly doors, a couple of cupholders and a massive 21in screen in the middle of the dash. As the name suggests, its crisp flat surfaces and full width light bars have more than a passing resemblance to the Cybertruck. There are 20 of them running round the studio lot at lowish speeds, but successfully dodging each other and well lubricated guests.

We elbow our way to the front for a ride and despite a petite footprint, interior space with only two seats is dramatic. The seats themselves are flat and squishy and reclined to promote a relaxed, lounge feel. Fasten your seatbelt and the door closes automatically. Tap your destination and you're away. It's silly easy. The driving style is cautious, but safety is of course paramount.

I was expecting the experience to be unnerving, but without any phantom wheel twirl, the whole thing feels more natural. I'm at ease within a few metres. No word on battery size or precise range yet, only that the target is to be the most efficient EV on the road, returning 5.5mpkWh. A range of around 200 miles is predicted, with a small battery to keep costs as low as possible. Hence the prototypes are inductive charging only, although whether it gets a plug for production is a topic of hot debate.

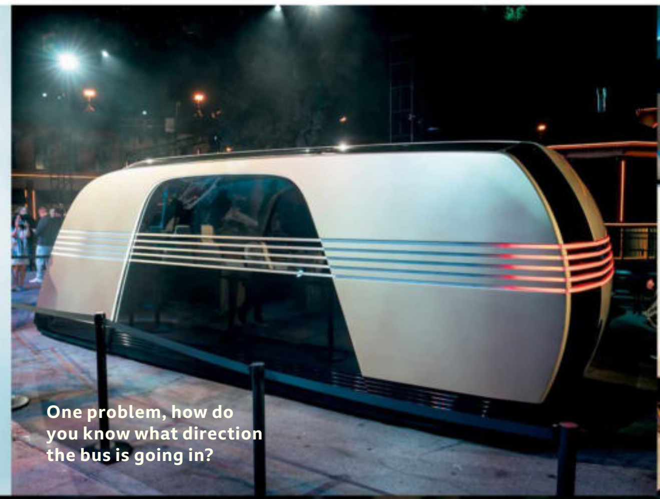
As is whether the whole thing is pure fantasy. That 2026 timeline and price targets have been met by snorts of laughter and cries of bulls**t. Tesla stock was actually down 10 per cent the day after the party, and you can see why – Elon's made crazy, unfounded claims before, he's the king of unfulfilled promises and lengthy product delays – and his presentation was packed with promises and shy on fine detail.

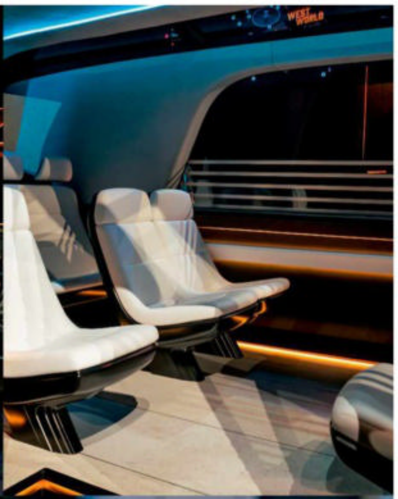
The hard part comes next. He claims he can convince California and Texas to allow Model 3s and Model Ys to roam around driverless as soon as next year. Really? Especially when the purely camera based tech that Tesla employs is considered to have fewer failsafes than the mixed lidar, radar and camera based system used on Waymo's driverless taxi fleet, already operating in San Francisco. Tesla engineers argue that having multiple sensors actually causes problems and confusion for the computer when you have conflicting inputs and need to decide which sensor to believe.

My instincts say Robotaxis could be rolling off a production line in small batches by 2026, but meaningful numbers? With the full app ecosystem open to all? At least two more years beyond that. Like any great transition it's a leap – for legislators and consumer trust. Tesla is betting that with familiarity that trust will come. I remember talking to a gentleman in the street when we first drove the finished Cybertruck who refused to accept it was a production car. Now LA is crawling with them; one passes and you barely bat an eyelid. This isn't the conclusion or even apex of Tesla's autonomous journey, but the beginning of it. There's a long way to go, only now we can catch up on our emails while we get there.

"WE'RE IN A REHEARSAL FOR ELON'S VISION OF OUR FUTURE"

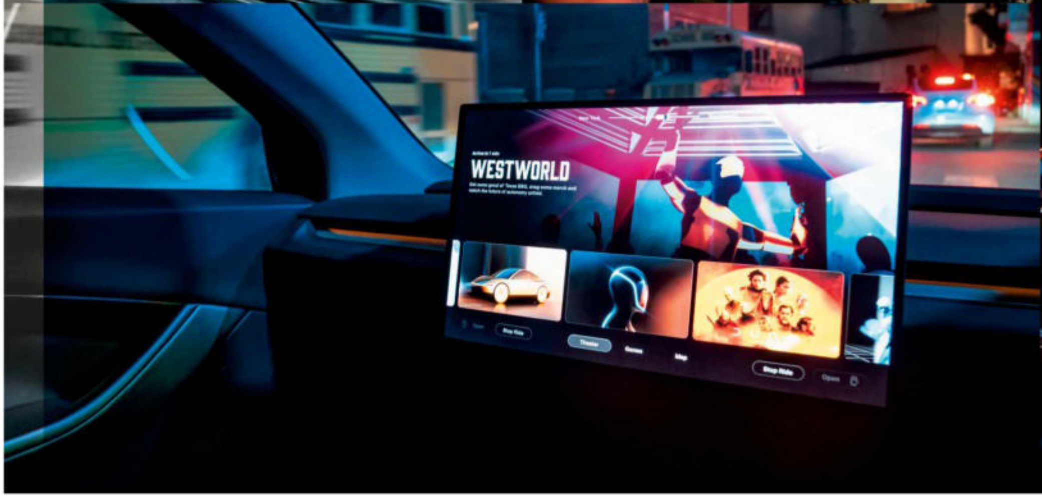
Bros
WB
WE, ROBOT

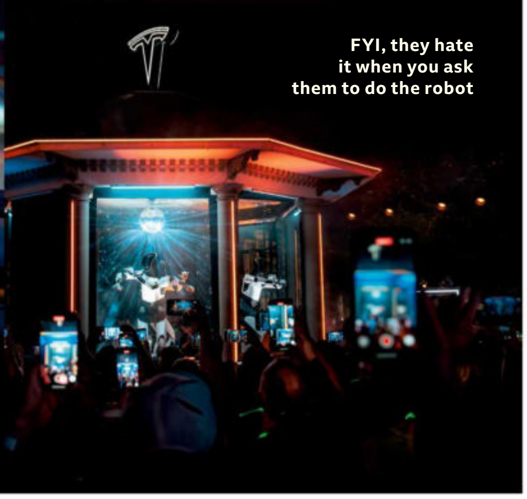

One problem, how do you know what direction the bus is going in?



Experts say driverless cars will free you up to do more productive things…

"Excuse me, is your charging port where we all think it is?"




FYI, they hate it when you ask them to do the robot

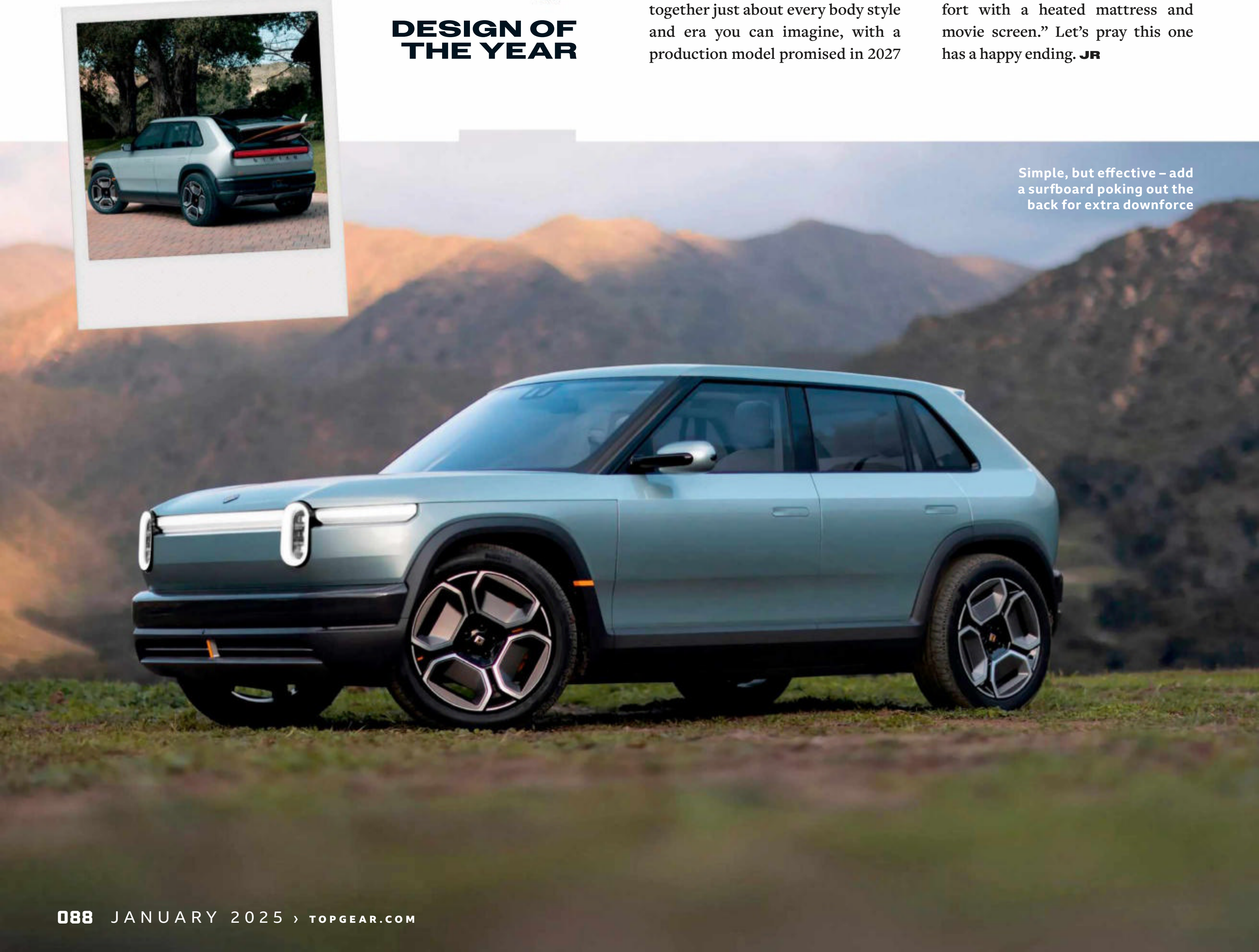
RIVIAN R3

DESIGN OF THE YEAR

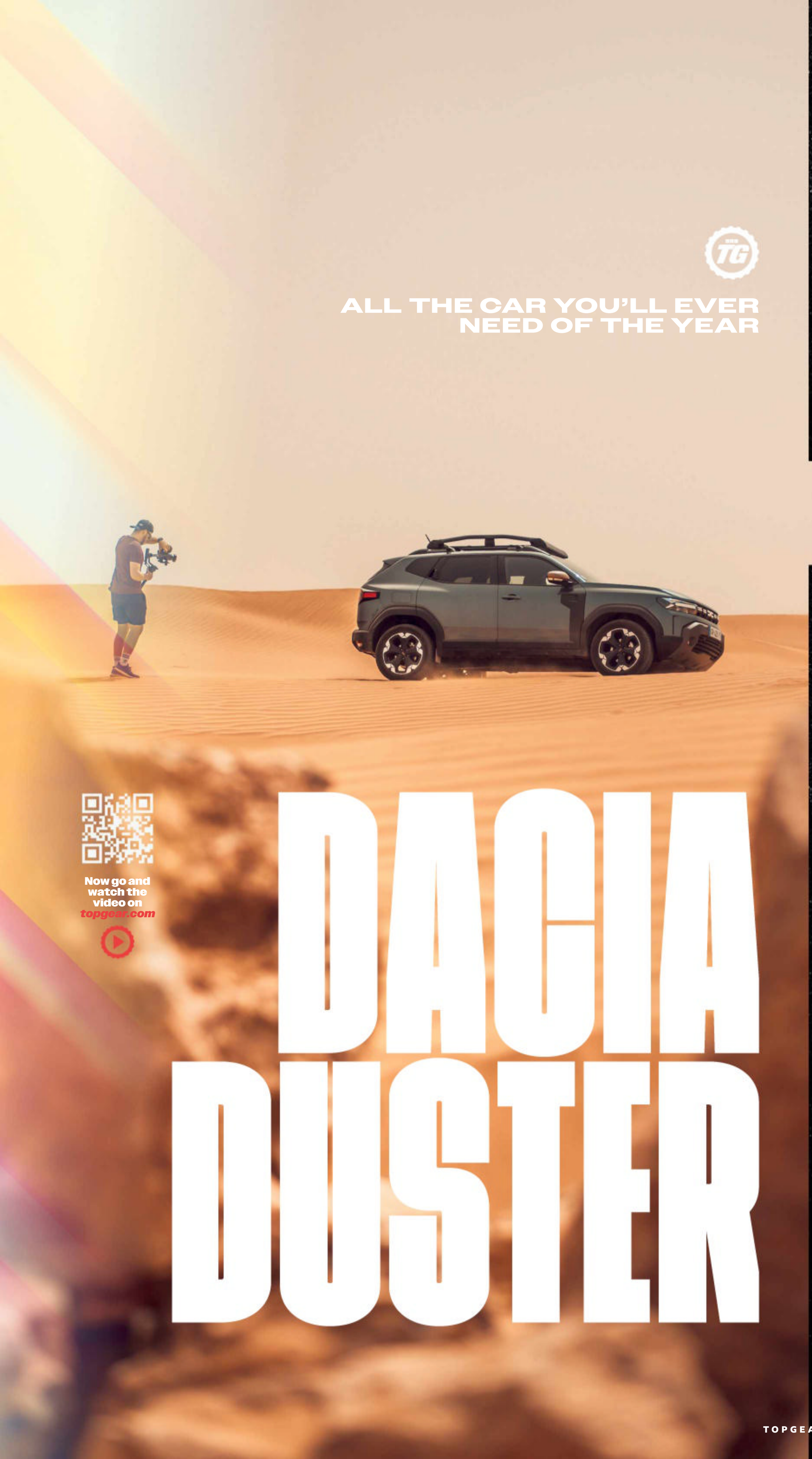
You can sit about in your polo neck discussing the merits and references of various car designs until the cows come home, but the greats – the ones that still look good decades on – slap instantly. As proved when Rivian invited the media to Laguna Beach in March to see its R2 – the first car on a new mid-sized platform, the golden goose designed to catalyse sales and take Rivian beyond US borders. The Important One. Except the moment CEO RJ Scaringe revealed his 'one more thing' surprise, the R2 became a sideshow.

Here was the R3, and you couldn't take your eyes off it – a compact crossover mashing together just about every body style and era you can imagine, with a production model promised in 2027 costing from $35,000. And you'd be forgiven for assuming the R3's reduced proportions and styling were tailored specifically for Euro tastes. Nope, the Americans in the room went just as nuts.

"It's like a crossover meets an SUV, meets a hatch, meets a wagon, meets a bunch of things. We say it has the soul of a rally car," Scaringe told us. We see echoes of early VW Golfs, a pinch of Lancia Delta and a dash of Lada Niva in the silhouette, which is a cocktail we never thought possible. The promo film depicted it powersliding on a gravel back road, the accessories include a 'treehouse' – "Our take on a rooftop tent brings the nostalgia of an epic childhood fort with a heated mattress and movie screen." Let's pray this one has a happy ending. **JR**



Simple, but effective – add a surfboard poking out the back for extra downforce



ALL THE CAR YOU'LL EVER NEED OF THE YEAR

DACIA DUSTER

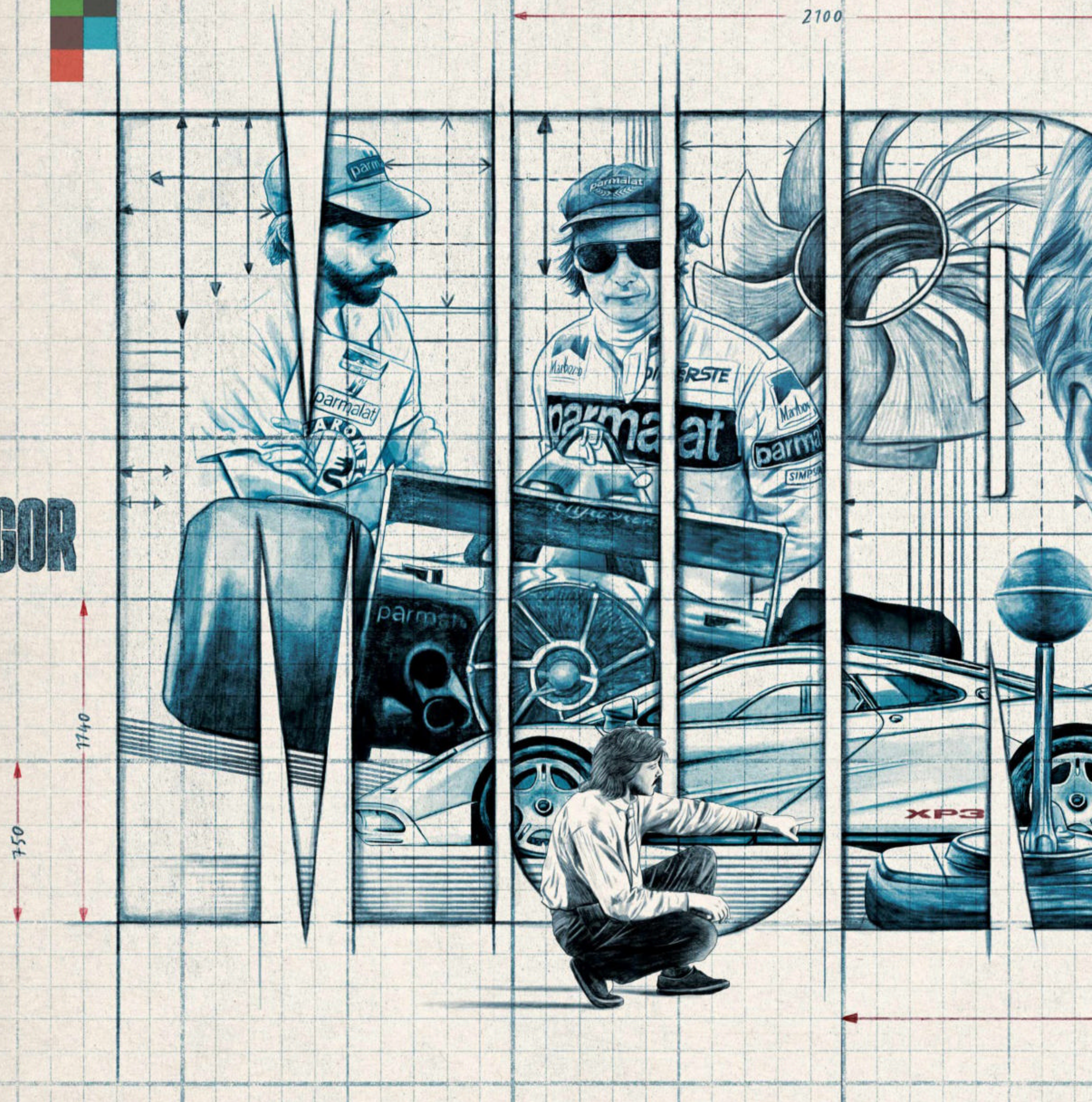
Now go and watch the video on *topgear.com*

Car companies do all sorts of market research and focus group work to really drill down to the essence of what needs to be done with new cars. We can only imagine there was one message from the Duster's research – don't ruin it. There was a chance of that happening – Dacia has gone all lifestyle since the last one, with that new Christmas cracker logo and a lot of muted greens.

Thankfully it's the first carmaker to advertise a lifestyle you or I might reasonably engage in – a spot of camping, walking in the woods, crying in the supermarket car park. But not over the price, the range starts at £18,745 and tops out at £26,745.

Most importantly, the Duster remains fun to drive *and* to live with. It's lightweight, but not cheap, with clever details like Dacia's YouClip system of grips that can hold optional cupholders, phone storage, and even both of those but with a torch attached. Or the brilliant modular roof rack. It's relentlessly focused on being useful. The full fat 4x4 version will even do some impressive off-roading, it makes you want a farm just so you can hare about in a field.

There's a hybrid, but it's softer and less fun – keep it analogue with this car, wring the neck of that 1.2-litre 3cyl petrol. There's a humility to the Duster, but no sense you have to slum it. We might end up shedding a tear over the combustion engine, but on this evidence it's going with quietly triumphal dignity. **SB**


2100
1740
750
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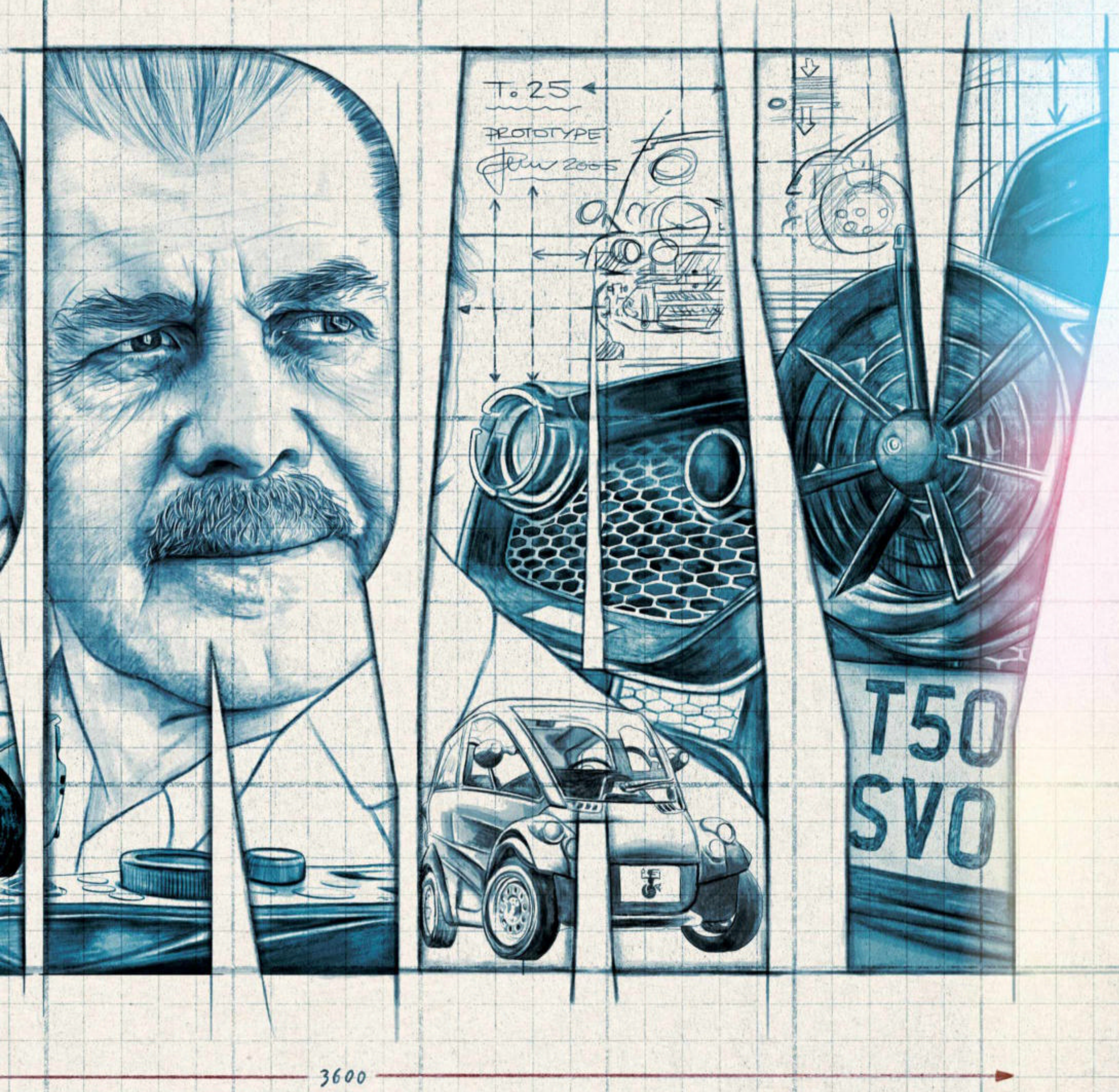
XP3

GOR

For over half a century one man, above all others, has

WORDS JASON BARLOW

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD


T.25
PROTOTYPE
2005
T50
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DON

wowed us on and off the track... and he's still going strong

ILLUSTRATION PETER STRAIN

Many of us doodled cars on our notepads back in the day. But there are doodles and then there's the Cuneo 1300 GT. It's credited to a young designer called Ian Gordon Murray, who rendered it in forensic detail on the drawing board in his teenage bedroom, in Durban, South Africa. Whatever became of him, one wonders?

Murray, arguably the greatest and most original thinker in both Formula One and the wider automotive sphere, is currently deep into a challenging new phase of his long and storied career. *TG* has saluted the GMA T.50 as perhaps the most perfectly realised driver's car of all time, and the company will complete delivery of the 100 car production run in 2025. That's all being done at an all new facility in Windlesham, Surrey, a building, coincidentally, that was designed by the man who's name is above the door. Next up is the T.33, but there's plenty more coming down the pipe.

Gordon Murray, we must remind ourselves, is 78.

It's a hell of a victory lap for an individual whose work has permeated our lives for well over 50 years. Longstanding Formula One fans can give chapter and verse on the Murray designed cars that still boggle the mind: the Brabham BT46B 'fan car', the exquisite early 1980s BT52, and the all conquering McLarens that defined the Prost and Senna era. The McLaren F1 road car is widely regarded as the greatest ever made, certainly the most singular. This has been a life well and ingeniously lived, so it's high time we acknowledged it.

TopGear: *Congratulations on the* TG *Lifetime Achievement Award. Do things like this matter to you?*

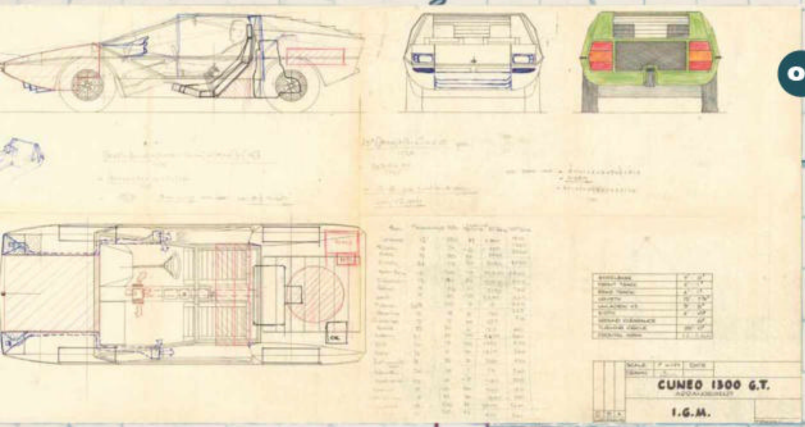
Gordon Murray: Everyone likes to be acknowledged. But honestly, all I've done in my life is do what I think I'd do well and have a lot of fun along the way. When you're in the middle of it, you don't think it's anything clever. It's just doing what you like doing.

TG: *Yours has been quite the journey.*

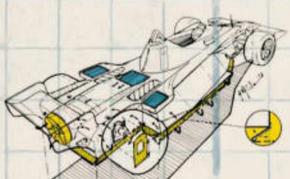
GM: I'm from a working class family. Four of us slept in one bedroom, we never owned a house, never had a new car or anything. I did an apprenticeship rather than go to university. In fact, I wouldn't be here now if I had. I did what was called a sandwich course, working for a company that made packaging, one day a week off and on two evenings I went to college. I had six months in the workshop learning how to machine and weld, I did all the drawings and had to make sure it was all fabricated properly. I was earning peanuts but it was enough to enable me to build my first racing car. I was 19 when I did that. So in five years I got the academic qualifications, the practical stuff in bucket loads, built an engine and a racing car and did two seasons racing in it. If I'd gone to university that would never have happened.

TG: *Selling everything you owned to finance a move to to the UK in 1969 was a pretty grownup decision. You ended up at Brabham, pretty much by chance. How did you feel when* [team owner] *Bernie Ecclestone, having fired everyone else, asked you to run the team's design office at the end of 1971?*

GM: I was obviously very pleased. I should have been terrified, given that I was essentially taking over the technical side of a Grand Prix team. But I absolutely wasn't. There were no sleepless nights. I couldn't wait to get into work every day. Clearly, you have to have a lot of self-confidence and if I want to do something,

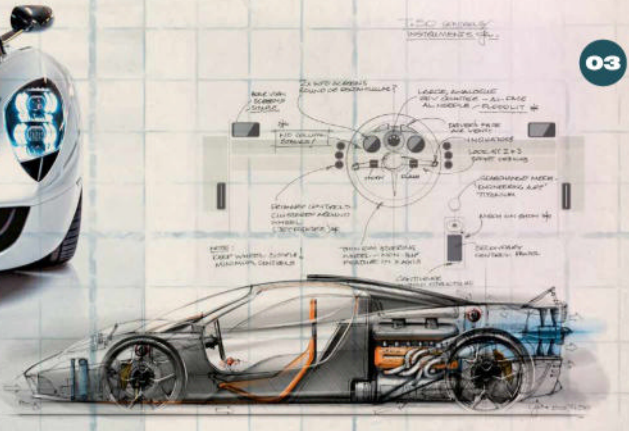

CUNEO 1300 G.T.
I.G.M.
01

COSWORTH
GMA2 V12



01 What did you do with your teen years? Murray created the Cuneo 1300 GT **02** Fans are a theme in Gordon's work – but not as much as his focus on lightness **03** McLaren F1's central driving position was carried over to T.50 **04** 1988 McLaren MP4/4 most successful F1 car ever until 2023 Red Bull RB19 **05** Murray designed and built four of these Minbugs in the early 1970s

Alfa Romeo
parmalat
02



Marlboro
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FILA
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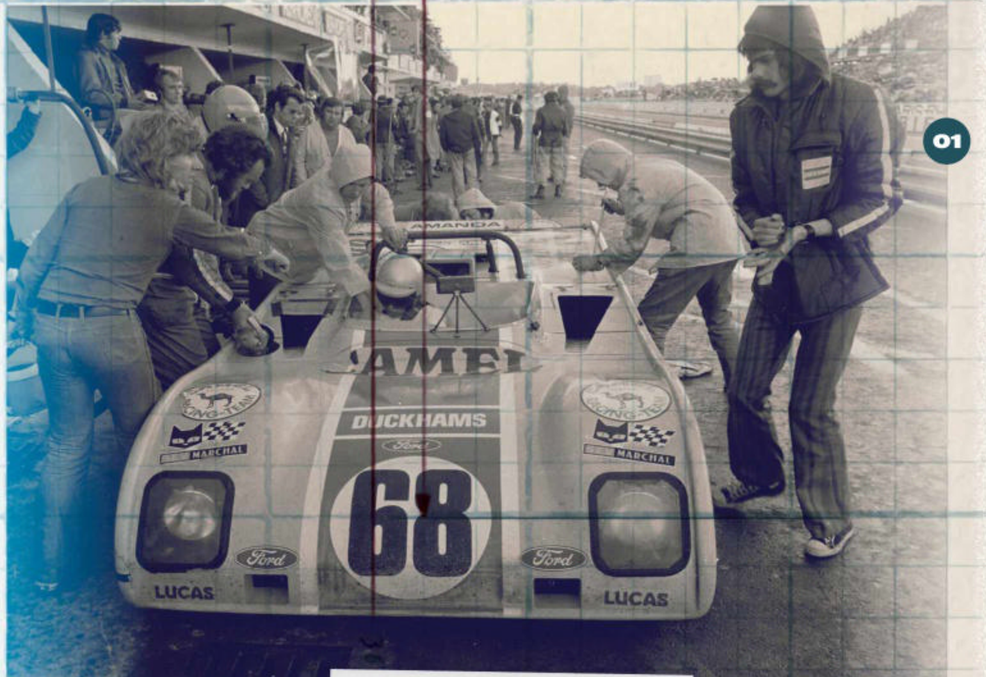
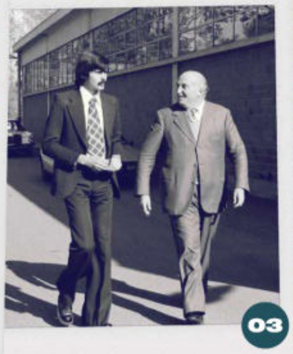
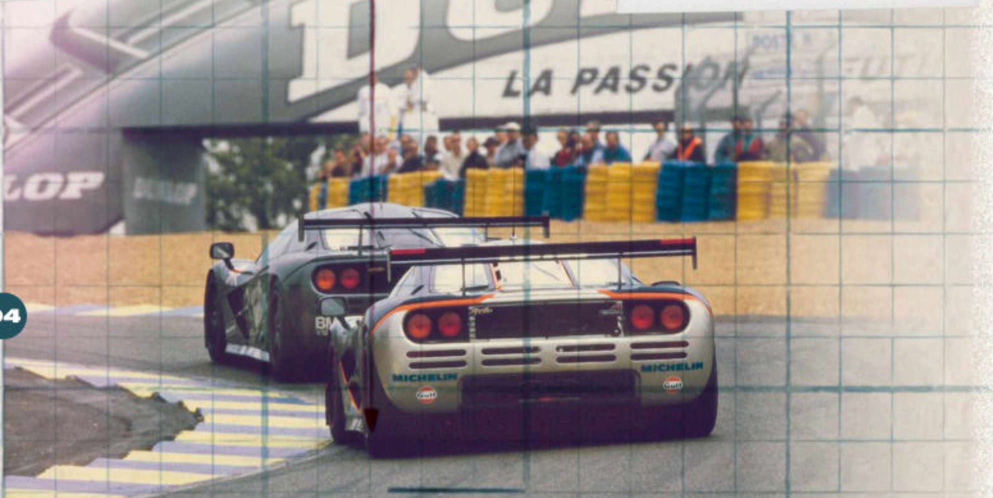
"I COULDN'T WAIT TO GET INTO WORK EVERY DAY"

IMAGES: LAT, MANUFACTURER







01 From the hoods and coats, we can only imagine that the Le Mans 24-Hour Race was especially nippy in 1972 **02** Mauro Forghieri chatting to Lauda at the 1976 Monaco GP **03** Gordon Murray and Carlo Chiti talking at the Brabham BT45 launch **04** McLaren F1 at Le Mans in 1995. Leading the race… of course

nothing is going to get in the way. But I can't imagine a 25-year-old now doing it.

TG: *You also found time to design a Group 6 Le Mans prototype [the Duckhams LM] in 1972 for Alain de Cadenet.*

GM: I had six months to design and build it. Stella [Gordon's wife] and I lived in a little flat in Claygate that was so cold we had ice forming on the inside of the windows. I had a tiny drawing board and I'd get home from Brabham at 8pm and work until 3am. We managed a 15 lap shakedown at Silverstone and a midnight run down the M4 at 200mph to check its high speed stability. Then we put it on a trailer behind a Transit van and went to Le Mans. We ran as high as fifth and were quicker than the Alfa Romeos and Porsches. But then Chris [Craft] fell off in the rain so we ended up 12th. But that put me on the map, I think, and it made Bernie sit up and pay attention.

TG: *And you designed another car, for yourself.*

GM: The Minbug. That had a bonded alumnium spaceframe and used lots of Mini bits. I made a batch of four in a shed in Heathrow and financed mine by selling the other three. We did 38,000 miles in it in four years. I did Brabham, the Duckhams Le Mans car, the Minbug and another little racing car in the same 15 month period. Looking back now, I have no idea how I managed to do all that. Lots of energy, I guess.

TG: *And you were across literally everything. Thermo- and aerodynamics, you could draw, you were an engineer…*

GM: We're a dying breed. Engine, gearbox, aero, the fuel system, cooling, suspension, the setup… the only person, I think, who could manage all of it in the same way was Mauro Forghieri [Scuderia Ferrari's legendary technical director in the 1960s and 1970s]. Maybe Carlo Chiti, too, who I worked with when Brabham ran Alfa Romeo engines. Colin Chapman never drew

IMAGES: LAT, MANUFACTURER

anything. Enzo Ferrari was a great entrepreneur and petrolhead but didn't draw. I always loved F1, sports car racing and road cars. I've done all three and still enjoy all three.

TG: *Do you think we'll ever see big characters like those again?*

GM: Mate Rimac makes things happen. He's got the entrepreneurial stuff. I don't know how much he draws or designs personally, but he's like Ron Dennis or Enzo Ferrari. He has the vision.

TG: *Did you have any inkling during your time at McLaren that you were in the middle of something so special? Senna, Prost and the MP4/4...*

GM: I didn't. It was... work. I had fun designing the cars. You're just so busy because there were only eight designers back then and we had four cars to design in three years and lots of rule changes. It was satisfying doing the MP4/4 because it had an identical driving position to the Brabham BT55. That had been a flop for various reasons but the idea wasn't a flop. The Honda engine sat lower and we reduced the centre of gravity, and the car just *flew.* That was very satisfying. I used to go down to the workshop and make sure everyone stayed motivated because you can become complacent if you win every race. Ron [Dennis] didn't get that. "Why do you waste 45 minutes every morning walking round the workshop?" I didn't think it was a waste. He just didn't understand running that side of a business.

TG: *And then came the McLaren F1.*

GM: It's very satisfying that it's being recognised now. Not because of its value, there's nothing clever about that, but because of what it stood for. The world's first carbon road car, the first with ground effect, the carbon clutch... all that stuff. It was so different. At the time, the media focused on the fact that it could do 240mph. That didn't interest me at all. Never has. And then it won Le Mans, which I think was the biggest achievement of all. Winning Le Mans is more difficult than winning the Formula One world championship. And it was a bonus that we never intended to go racing with that car.

TG: *You're writing a biography now. Finally...*

GM: My PA Jenna, who's been with me for years, asked me if it's going to cover all my interests – art, design, houses, Bob Dylan, wine, as well as the motor racing... she suggested doing a series of little side books for posterity, so when the biographer comes in, he can access those to help the process. Great idea, I thought, except that we're up to 31 of them now. For the place in Scotland we have, which makes its own energy, I drew everything – the electrics, the plumbing, even the drainage system. I love doing buildings. The new [GMA] building in Windlesham is very satisfying.

TG: *Do you still have the famous T-shirt collection?*

GM: Yes. That's one of the books, actually. We had them all photographed. I thought there might be a few hundred, but we counted them – there's 980! The Sex Pistols one is worth £1,600 and there's a satin Rolling Stones tour jacket apparently worth £10k. Unbelievable really.

TG: *Is there anything left to achieve?*

GM: Oh God, yeah. My passion is for cars, racing and buildings. I love doing it. It doesn't feel like work.

TG: *And we haven't even discussed electric cars. That's one for another day.*

GM: Yeah. Probably in about 15 years' time...

CAR OF THE YEAR

STAR

Yep, Renault's retro-chic new supermini with an optional wicker baguette holder scoops the grand prix…

WORDS PAUL HORRELL
PHOTOGRAPHY JONNY FLEETWOOD

IT took a surprising amount of sniffing around until I managed to find a dusty old Renault 5 and wedge our shiny green machine alongside for a family photo. And this was the south of France where the climate is kind to old bangers, even ones that ended production three decades ago. Only a very few years ago it would have been easy. Most villages had a one man band garage with a petrol pump and dark messy service bay, its walls covered with rusting enamel signs: Cibié, Kléber, Yacco. Round the back you'd glimpse semi-abandoned Renaults and Peugeots, the more senior of them with the telltale yellow headlights. That, in my mind's eye, was to have been our ideal photo location. If Renault's hype machine wants us to recall the original 5, very well, we'd do it with an elegantly shabby example, scrapyard dog in the background yanking ominously at its chain.

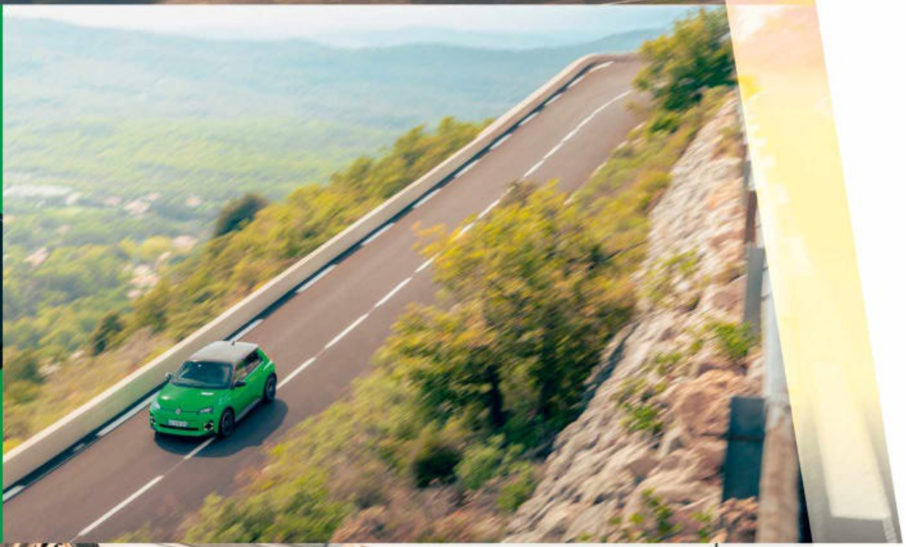
France held out much longer than Britain against the march of the shiny glass palace corporate franchised car dealerships, but now it's gone that way too. So your village *garagiste*, his lifespan doubtless curtailed by decades of drawing at a Gitane while pumping leaded four star, is now as hard to find as your original R5.

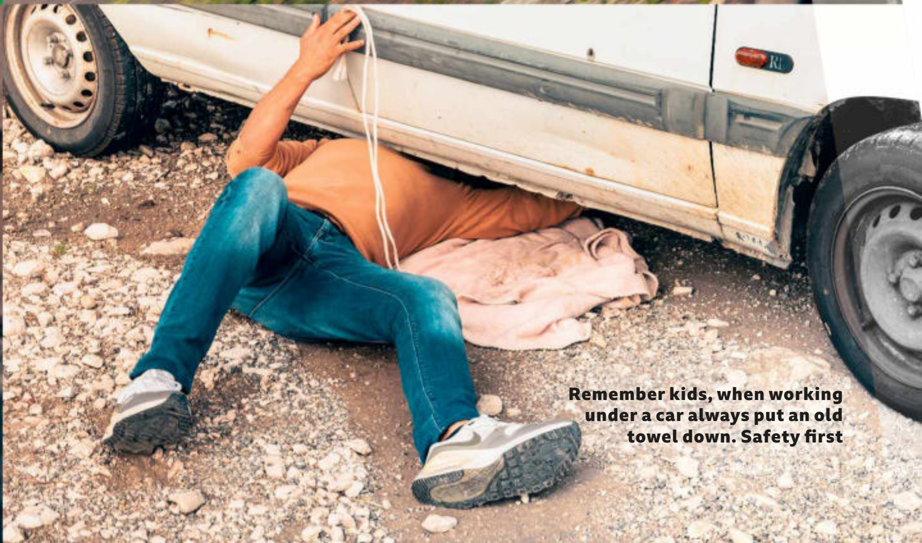
The new R5 is bigger and fancier and electric. Well of course the R5 has changed. France has changed. Just along from its garage, each village would have a *bar tabac* and a *boulangerie*. Last summer I cycled across France. I expected to stop every couple of hours at one of those for a *grand crème* and

“THE NEW R5 IS BIGGER AND FANCIER AND ELECTRIC”

A Renault partly fuelled by unrefined nostalgia, but mostly electricity

Green looks great but rust, dents and Gauloises burns in the seats would have been more authentic





Remember kids, when working under a car always put an old towel down. Safety first a bun – pain aux raisins in the morning and religieuse in the afternoon thanks very much. In the end I nearly always went hungry and suffered persistently high levels of blood in my caffeinestream. Those pivots of village life have disappeared. Maybe it was the pandemic that did for them but I guess general social change and urbanisation has been the bigger driver, leaving the rural communities as little more than overconserved tourist attractions.

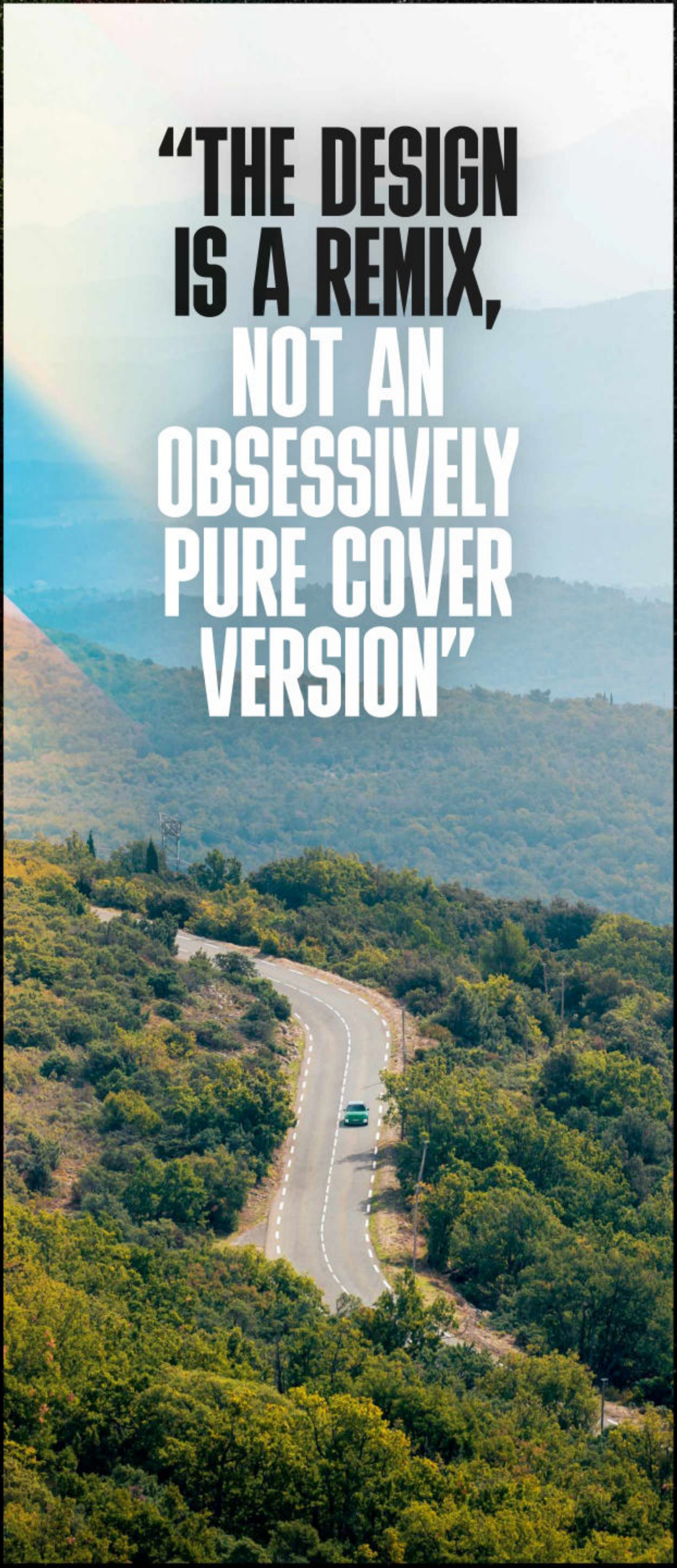
The new 5 can't just be a conserved trinket, relying on some sort of folk memory of French chic. To people over 50, the original 5 is a memory bathed in golden sunlight, our parents' car or our first. But to anyone younger that, it probably means nothing. So the new 5 has to be an attractive and appealing car in itself.

And is. Appealing in the looks, yes, but also made and detailed to be a quality object. The lights and jewellery and big wheels on the outside, and inside the materials and touchpoints are well chosen. This is a mid-spec one, with the longer range 52kWh battery for 255 miles of range. It's propelled by a 150bhp high voltage rare earth free electric motor, gets to 62mph in eight seconds, runs multi-link rear suspension and has a heat pump. So £27k is a pretty solid bargain.

The four-cornered motif in the headlights winks as you approach. The foglights have the same graphic, and so do the dashboard vents. The rear lights refer to the MkII Supercinq R5, the one-piece seatbacks to the Gordini version and the wheelarches to the mad-arse mid-engined 5 Turbo rally car. The very first R5 had a bonnet vent. Here it's not a vent but a state of charge indicator. So the new 5's design is a remix with plenty of samples, not an obessively pure cover version.

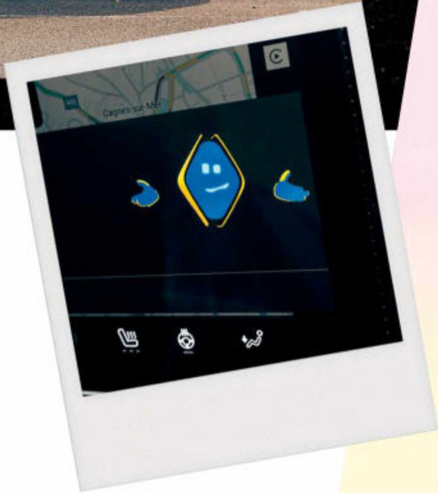
Inside, we find more backward-slash-forward glances. The dash has stitching to emulate the original car's ridged plastic moulding and the headlining distantly resembles a rattan basket. The binnacle is a similar rectangular shape to the original's. But of course this time around it houses flatscreens running the driver interface we've praised in other Renaults. Around that, and on the steering column, a population of well placed real switches make it quick and easy to operate with your eyes on the road. You sit low, with no sense of being perched on a battery. It's compact even for a supermini mind, so rear legroom is tight but not inhumane.

Stuck in traffic in Nice, it's unsurprisingly a centre of attraction. It copes happily with the city – the accelerator takes up smoothly, the brakes are progressive at easy speeds, it's little and nippy and easy to see out of. But I want to be away from here. Up in the hills are roads I've often used for testing supercars and hot hatches. Why go there in an



"THE DESIGN IS A REMIX, NOT AN OBSESSIVELY PURE COVER VERSION"

“WHEN A CAR HAS BEEN MADE BY PEOPLE WHO LOVE IT, IT SHOWS”



electric supermini? Because between the wide open stretches they have narrow twists and bumps where a decent low power car should be able show off a bit. And a ropey one will stumble.

The R5 gets up the slopes well. Its 150bhp is just enough zip for 1,400kg. The Route Napoleon and Col de Vence don’t defeat it. The steering response, at first blush, is proportional but a little numb. Still, that makes it easy to drive smoothly, and it (mostly) masks torque steer. Besides, the body is allowed to roll, giving you a sense of what’s going on and helping the inside front wheel with traction. Get keener and the picture brightens. The steering becomes a clearer window to the road, and this happy little car avoids any nose heavy attitude and doesn’t wash its front tyres wide. When grip does run out, it’s likely to be from both ends, and you can tuck the nose in some more with a little accelerator lift. It’s pretty engaging.

Of course, in pursuit of that cornering precision it can’t ride like an original 5. And you wouldn’t want it to – those early ones wobbled and heaved like they’d been too long on the *pastis*. At town speed the springing feels taut, but never harsh or noisy. As you get moving on bumpy roads, the setup will take the big hits quite deftly. Because the anti-roll bars can be soft thanks to the low centre of gravity, you’re not rocked about, and the sophisticated rear suspension keeps high frequency harshness well under control. This refinement, as with the progressive pedals and steering, make the R5 feel like a bigger more grownup car when that’s what you want.

It’s clever too. Climbing up into the mountains I’d put a significant dent in the battery. In most electric cars the range guessometer and satnav would have been equally pessimistic for the journey back. But the 5’s systems know about gravity, and predicted, as turned out to be the case, that it’d take me only two per cent to get the 30 miles back to the coast. Thank you, regenerative braking.

It’s also got bidirectional charging to the grid, so on a home socket you can buy electricity overnight and sell back when the price rises, subsidising your ownership. Less smart is the so-called AI assistant, Reno. Its avatar looks like a very slightly fattened-up version of Clippy the Microsoft paperclip and nearly every question I asked just got a shrug and an apologetic eyeroll. It demeans this lovely and smart car.

Still, in an original 5 you’d have been lucky to have had a radio cassette never mind AI. The new 5, as I say, is not an old 5. And yet… it’s freighted with significance, just as the first 5 was in 1972. Both mark a pivot from one world era to another and one kind of motoring to another. There’s something else. Back when incoming boss Luca de Meo gave the nod to the new 5, the pandemic was raging, car companies were in huge trouble and most of us smartarse commentators were assuming Renault would be the most likely company to fail. Instead it’s now doing fine, because the spirit of the place is revived. Developing the 5 has been an internal totem. Remaking one of Renault’s 24-carat greatest hits has galvanised everyone in the company to pour their uttermost efforts into it. Designers and engineers worked most of the way round the clock to perfect it. And when a car has been made by people who love it, it shows.

BLUE GENES

Sacré bleu!
You can have
a fast one too.
Here comes
Alpine's hot
take on the 5…
the A290

WORDS JACK RIX
PHOTOGRAPHY
MARK RICCIONI

As a seedling for some of the most loved and least sane hot hatches ever made, the original Renault 5 was prolific. There was the loopy rally homologation, 970kg, mid-engined Turbo 1 in 1978 with a (not so loopy these days) 160bhp from its turbo 1.4-litre engine. The more mainstream 115bhp GT Turbo that (after a few seconds of lag, natch) boosted onto the hot hatch scene in 1985 and gave modifiers something cheap and readily available to tinker with right through the 1990s and early 2000s. And the 1976 Renault 5 Gordini (known fittingly as the Renault 5 Alpine everywhere except the UK) that, along with the MkI VW Golf GTI that arrived a couple of months after, helped to kickstart the hot hatch movement.

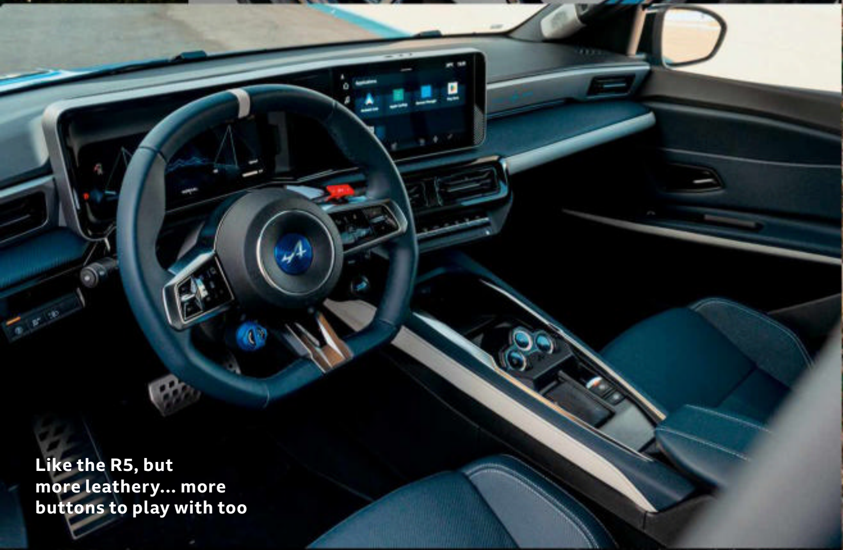
Renault, or more precisely Alpine – its spicy sub-brand that's been carved off as a separate entity – wasn't about to miss out on heritage like that. So mere weeks after first shaking hands with the new 5 in France, we're in Mallorca finding out whether Alpine, the architect of the sublime featherweight A110 sports car, can turn an EV supermini into a bona fide performance car. Manufacturers are deserting the hot hatch segment with alarming regularity, so is this the car to introduce the joys of small, nimble and mildly overpowered shopping trolleys to a whole new generation?

We have the range topping FWD 217bhp GTS, aka the one you want, 0–60mph in a Fiesta ST matching 6.4secs. Quick enough for a compact hot hatch, despite weighing 1,479kg – which is both horrifying and commendable, given that's 200kg lighter than the equivalent Mini Cooper SE. It promises a WLTP range of 236 miles from its 52kWh battery and gets 100kW DC rapid charging capability, enough for 15–80 per cent in 30 minutes. A lower spec GT version with 178bhp is also available from £33,500, although this GTS will cost you £38k.

Styling first because while the overall, stumpy silhouette is shared with the R5, the details are new – 19-inch wheels, fattened arches, deepened side sills, four lights at the front that riff off the A110, but add crosses to evoke rally cars of old. The charge indicator light on the bonnet has switched to an Alpine 'A', the rear door panels are scalloped to recall the R5 Turbo and round the back there's a deeper diffuser and a strip across the bootlid Alpine is optimistically calling a ducktail spoiler. Frankly it looks fantastic, if a little fussy next to the cleaner and more obviously retro inspired Renault.

On the inside, similar story. A unique steering wheel with various tricks including an 'OV' button that gives you a shortcut to full throttle when you can't be bothered to flex your right foot. I realise

Intricate, 19in 'snowflake' wheels – work particularly well with winter tyres. Ba-dum-tss



Like the R5, but more leathery… more buttons to play with too

this sounds pointless, and it is, but boosting out of corners using your thumb is a gimmick I'm onboard with. You also get four levels of regen toggled by twisting a switch, and a button to flip between your various driving modes.

Unique seats introduce some proper bolstering, but remain squishy, while the materials, save for a few scratchy plastics around the gearbox buttons, are all unexpectedly premium. Soft to the touch stitched leather and a chunky slab of screen run from behind the wheel to the middle of the dash. This isn't a stripped out cousin of a Clio Cup, it's a luxury car with some added zip (thanks to the stronger motor, retuned anti-roll bars, firmer suspension settings and Michelin Pilot Sport 4S tyres developed specifically).

To the racetrack! Where it's a bit out of its depth – 1,479kg and 'only' 217bhp will do that, so we leave the brakes smoking and an array of understeer and oversteer moments in our wake. But stay within the boundaries of physics, preferably on the road, and there's proper playfulness baked into this car, a willingness for the rear axle to rotate around the front if you turn in with aggression.

Acceleration is a satisfying surge, rather than all-out fireworks. Which is a good thing, because unlike most mega bhp performance cars these days, you can actually deploy full beans on the road without fear of losing your licence or ending up backwards in a hedge. Having said that, I suggest turning off the traction control and ESC completely if the road's dry because wheelspin and a wriggle of torque steer is a crucial part of the hot hatch experience.

What's not is the general feeling of solidity, quality and comfort. Drive sensibly and you feel the weight and low centre of gravity working in your favour, it feels like a bigger and more grownup car than it actually is. The steering is mostly light and a bit numb, but there's added value to keeping your foot in thanks to a synthetic soundtrack that crescendos and hardens, then dies back gradually like the revs falling on a 'proper' engine. Having no gears to shift unavoidably detracts from your engagement in the process, but there's enough going on here to justify taking the long way home.

Two distinct sides to its personality then – on one hand a car you could happily commute in every day, enjoying its refinement and how ridiculously easy it is to use. On the other, it's clearly made by people who were prepared to sweat the finer details, and who know exactly how a hot hatch should behave. Not an instant classic, like the A110, or with the broader appeal of the £10k less R5, but a ray of hope nonetheless for the future of the hot hatch.

"YOU CAN DEPLOY THE FULL BEANS WITHOUT FEAR OF LOSING YOUR LICENCE"

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GZ-968-SP

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RETRO

BECAUSE THEY DON'T MAKE 'EM LIKE THEY USED TO

HEADLINER

ELECTROMECHANIC

Meet the electric restomod that you can create at home – it's so easy you can do the conversion in a day, apparently

WORDS GREG POTTS **PHOTOGRAPHY** HUCKLEBERRY MOUNTAIN

Electrogenic's 'drop-in' kit allows you to convert your old Mini into an EV from the comfort of your own garage. Apparently it's so straightforward, even a novice could fit it...

"It's super simple," read the missive from editor Rix. "Aim is to fit the entire EV kit to a Mini in a day. Prove how easy it is." Erm, right. I will freely admit that, while I can talk and write about cars until the brake horsepowers come home, I'm not exactly the handiest with a spanner.

The kit itself is Electrogenic's latest offering. The Oxfordshire-based firm has been converting classics since 2018 and will still build your car for you if you ask nicely, but having racked up a two year waiting list it recently decided to progress its self-install scheme. You won't be recreating Jason Momoa's electric 1929 Rolls-Royce Phantom II in your living room any time soon (Electrogenic reckons that build was "the most ambitious and complex EV conversion ever undertaken") but the Mini kit doesn't require any high voltage work and so can be done by those with a small amount of mechanical experience, a ramp and a decent toolkit.

That convenience is what we're here to test, and why the Electrogenic Mini is our Retro Hero of the Year 2024. Oh, and because the converted Cooper van that we tested back in issue 389 wiped the floor with the Moke and the Microlino.

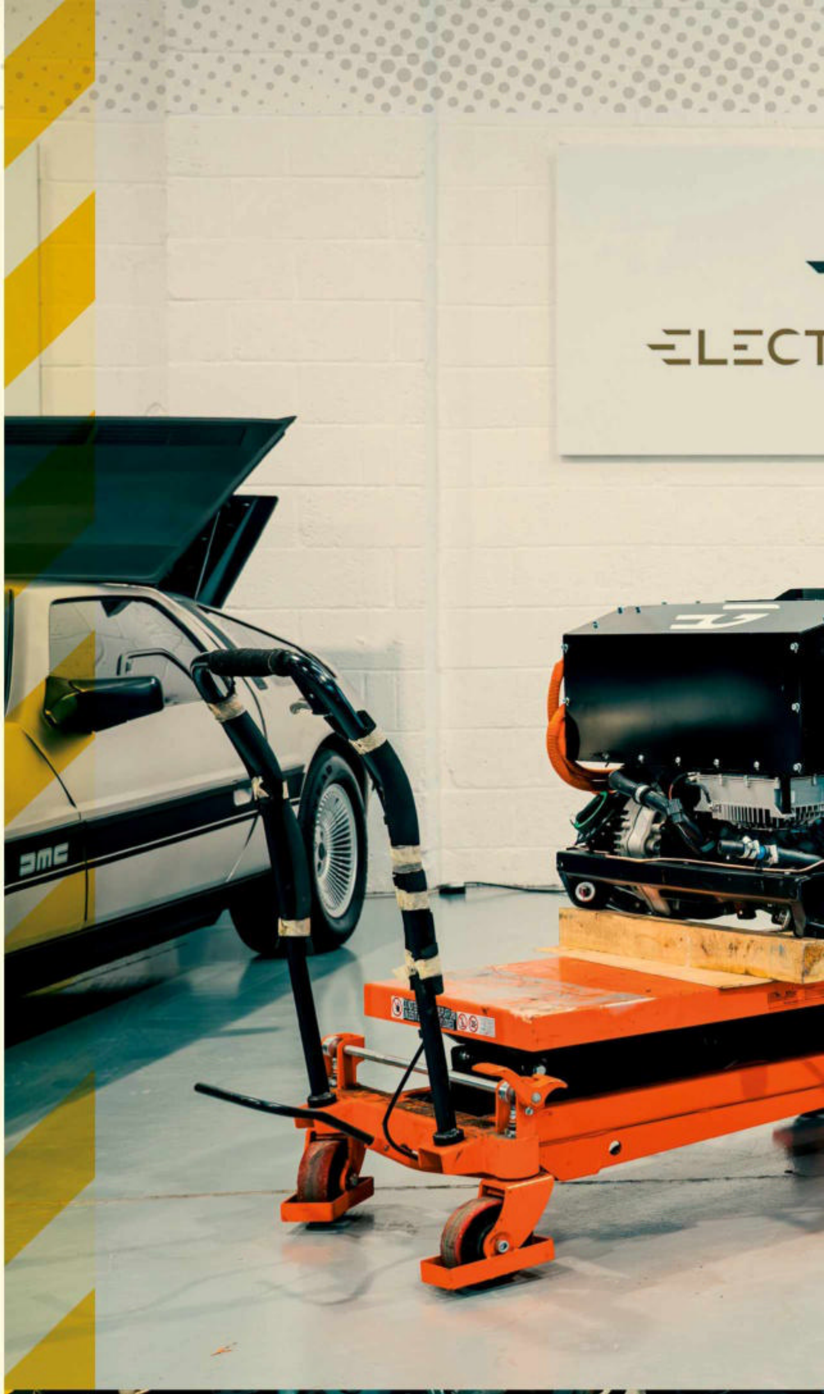
Anyway, best get started if we're to drive this thing out of the workshop later today. Thankfully Electrogenic hasn't just stuck me in a corner of the workshop (an ex-TWR facility in Kidlington) and left me to it. I've got the help of engineer Louis Hayes-Hamilton for the entirety of his working day to turn this Japanese-spec 1996 Rover Mini into a proper electric restomod.

Handily, before I arrived Electrogenic spent two days prepping the car, which included removing the dinky A-series engine, but the conversion kit is ready and waiting just as it'd look for a customer. Amazingly, the whole setup fits under the bonnet of the original Mini and comes premounted on a new front subframe that Electrogenic builds in-house. The package includes a 3.3kW onboard AC charger and a 60bhp electric motor with a 20kWh battery stuck on top that should provide around 80 miles of range. An extra 20kWh unit housed in the boot will be an option, but that may need to be fitted by one of Electrogenic's 'installation partners'.

As it turns out, only six bolts connect the Mini's front subframe to the body, so once we've popped the teeny 12-inch wheels off, removed the ball joints and disconnected the dampers, we're able to drop the original subframe out by hand.

To speed things up at this point, Louis drafts in some proper help from elsewhere in the Electrogenic team. This particular Mini is destined for life as a demo car (brave letting *TopGear* anywhere near it), so the opportunity is taken to change the brake discs, pads, master cylinder, brake lines, dampers and a load of bushes while the suspension is moved onto the new subframe. If you're taking on the conversion to electric power at home, you'd probably use this opportunity to do the same, even if your 60bhp motor merely reflects the power of the original.

Next up we need to drop the car down onto its fresh subframe and introduce the 28-year-old Mini to its new heart.

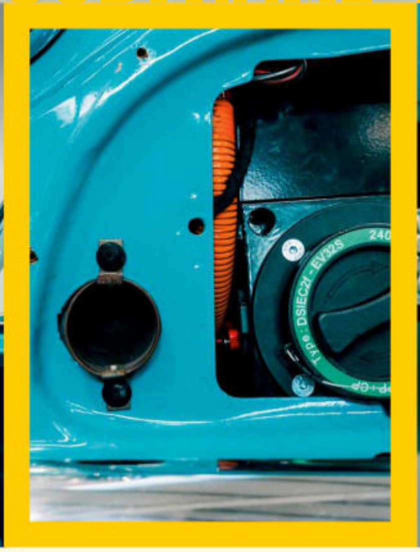


Powered by ELECTROGENIC

ELECTROGENIC
ELECTROGENIC
ELEV8 GARAGE EQUIPMENT

“AS IT TURNS OUT, ONLY SIX BOLTS CONNECT THE MINI’S SUBFRAME TO THE BODY”

Not the face of a man who spends his Sunday mornings under a bonnet...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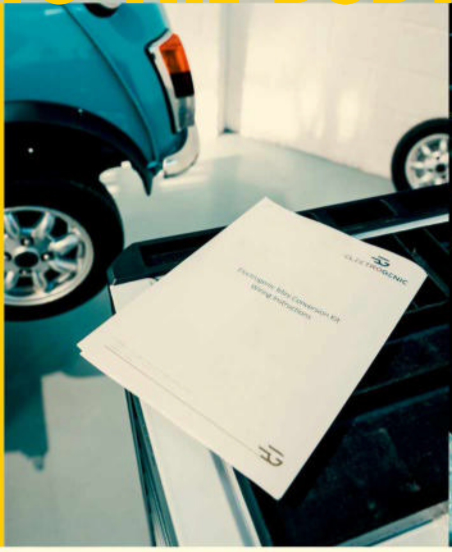

ELECTROGENIC

“WE’RE ABLE TO CONFIRM THAT I HAVEN’T MESSED ANYTHING UP TOO BADLY”

RETRO HERO OF THE YEAR

It's a supremely tight fit to clear the brake lines, the rubber boots on the driveshafts and the bonnet release as the car drops down, but once we've clarified the actual direction of "backwards" and "forwards" Louis gets it all lined up and into place... with the help of a crowbar and a couple of blocks of wood. Who knew that a Mini wouldn't have much space up front? Time for lunch.

After yet another coffee I'm tasked with torquing up the bolts connecting our new subframe to the body. Only one of six ends up rounded – not bad going in my book. The whole system is water cooled, so next up the new radiator (sourced from a motorbike) goes in. It lives in the same spot as it would when paired with an internal combustion engine, but the fan is supremely tricky to get tied down. I decide against deploying Jeremy's timesaving Caterham building tactic of missing out washers, although that wouldn't have flown with Louis leading the build – I accidentally miss one and he's spotted it in seconds. The high voltage fuse box is then mounted and we manage to get all of the necessary brackets in place. I say we, but without Louis there would inevitably still be a gaping hole up front.

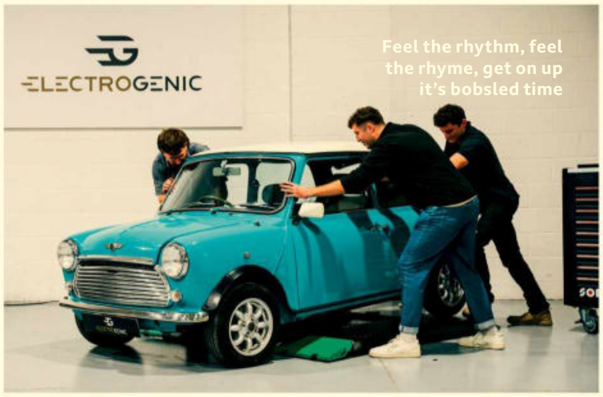
With the clock ticking down and the team wanting to leave this side of midnight, Ben Davies is brought in to look after the low voltage wiring while Louis bleeds the brakes. Usually you'd need to follow a wiring diagram and splice a few wires yourself during one of these builds, but Ben has already whacked on a load of connectors to make our day that bit easier. In fact, it's pretty much plug and play at this point. The Electrogenic kit uses all of the existing grommets and there's no need to cut into the dash at all – the company prides itself on its conversions being reversible in case you change your mind and want to switch back to petrol power.

No turning back now, though. A potentiometer throttle pedal is added (it's actually the same one as Electrogenic uses on its Land Rover Defender conversions but with a new mount) so that lifting off can activate the regenerative braking and the lovely(ish) wooden dashboard goes back in with just three screws. Simple. Electrogenic taps into all of the original switches and gauges so that everything should work as normal if you follow the instructions, and the original wiring loom will still be in place so that even the fiddliest bits can be returned to standard. In this car we fit a 3D printed drive selector, but that could apparently be replaced by a simple switch on the dash if the customer requested. Turns out a return to its factory spec might be a bit trickier than usual on this car though, because a peek under the carpet shows that it was once painted British Racing Green rather than its current turquoise shade.

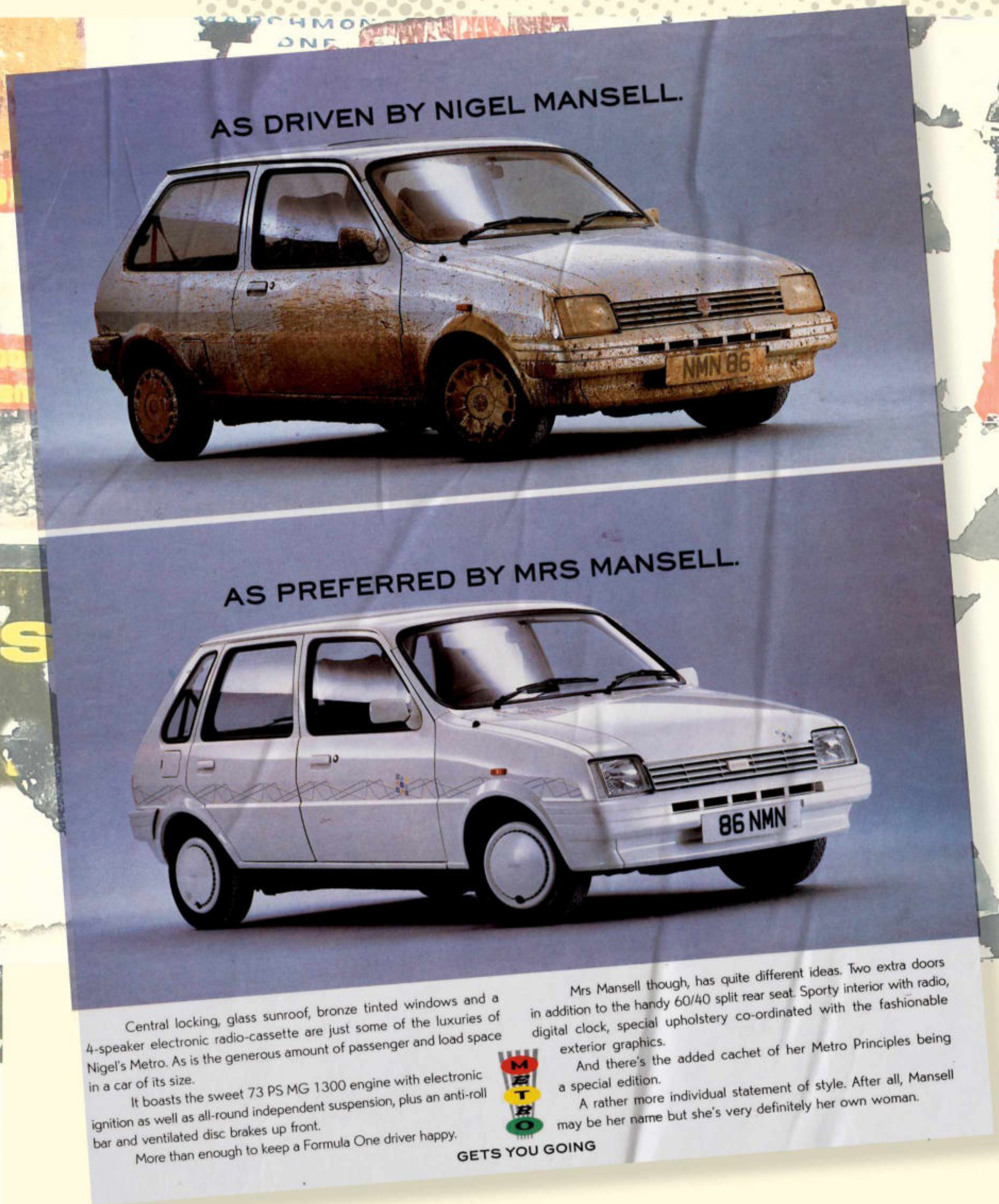
As the wheels hit terra firma for the first time since the transplant, the Mini whirrs into life. Customers will get a diagnostics app to check that everything is behaving as it should at this point, but we're able to use Electrogenic's own reader to confirm that I haven't managed to mess anything up too badly. All of the Mini kits will have their powertrains fully bench tested before being shipped, so there shouldn't be any surprises. Battery, motor and inverter temperatures are all satisfactory, and having jacked up the front end we can confirm that the kit is sending its power to the wheels. It lives.

As the night fog rolls in, the roller shutter rises and I drive *TG*'s very own electromod into the dark. After a few laps of the block, I wish we were keeping it. Electric power suits the car perfectly with 100lb ft of torque available at all times and enough regen to drive it on one pedal. You still get that lovely unassisted steering too, and there isn't a noticeable weight difference. Heck, this conversion even gives you normal, eco and sport drive modes. It's a complex bit of engineering, but Electrogenic has designed the kit so even a motoring journalist can fit it. I reckon I could even have managed it without help from the engineers who built it. Well, if given the full set of instructions and a time limit of 12 days rather than 12 hours.

Founder and CEO Steve Drummond tells us that the first kits should be shipped at Easter in 2025, but prices are yet to be finalised. His aim is for enthusiasts to be able to spend around £7,000 on a donor car, before buying the kit and fitting it for less than the price of a new £30k Mini Cooper E. We know which we'd rather have.



Feel the rhythm, feel the rhyme, get on up it's bobsled time



AS DRIVEN BY NIGEL MANSELL.

AS PREFERRED BY MRS MANSELL.

Central locking, glass sunroof, bronze tinted windows and a 4-speaker electronic radio-cassette are just some of the luxuries of Nigel's Metro. As is the generous amount of passenger and load space in a car of its size.

It boasts the sweet 73 PS MG 1300 engine with electronic ignition as well as all-round independent suspension, plus an anti-roll bar and ventilated disc brakes up front.

More than enough to keep a Formula One driver happy.

Mrs Mansell though, has quite different ideas. Two extra doors in addition to the handy 60/40 split rear seat. Sporty interior with radio, digital clock, special upholstery co-ordinated with the fashionable exterior graphics.

And there's the added cachet of her Metro Principles being a special edition.

A rather more individual statement of style. After all, Mansell may be her name but she's very definitely her own woman.

GETS YOU GOING

Car ads that time forgot

METRO, 1986

"A British car to beat the world" was the slogan when the Mini Metro arrived. Even Nigel Mansell (and Mrs M) had the "true driver's car", well, according to the adverts anyway. Mansell, Murray Walker and Eric Idle even did a TV commercial together for the Metro, and this pioneering print ad ploughs through sexism and somehow champions individual rights on the other side.

IMAGES: ALAMY

FESTIVAL OF WILLYS

Classic Jeeps, piled high with coffee beans, plantains and grandfather clocks, doing wheelies in the street? Count us in

That time we...

WENT TO COLOMBIA TO WATCH JEEPS DANCING IN THE STREET

TopGear has always been a willing vehicle for, shall we say, fringe automotive behaviour. Credit to Yorkshire ex-punk turned PR maestro Peter Rawlinson for pushing tall tales of Colombia's Yipao festival into my inbox. It's not the sort of thing you casually stumble upon, a madcap carnival of surplus American military Willys jeeps that have migrated south and become part of the fabric of everyday life. Quindio is one of Colombia's key coffee growing regions and these old jeeps have replaced mules as the primary means of transportation in the tricky terrain.

The locals like to celebrate the fact. Truly you have not lived until you've seen a procession of several hundred jeeps, many of them piled high in a gleefully health and safety defying manner with fruit, vegetables and – gulp – fridge freezers, make its way through a town on the edge of verdant rainforest.

Then there was local hero Pesebre, a man who puts his jeep into a perfectly executed pirouette before climbing out the window and dangling off the front, like a crazy matador. You couldn't make it up. Luckily I didn't have to...

WORDS: JASON BARLOW

REMEMBERING
RETRO GAMING
THE CLASSICS

#62

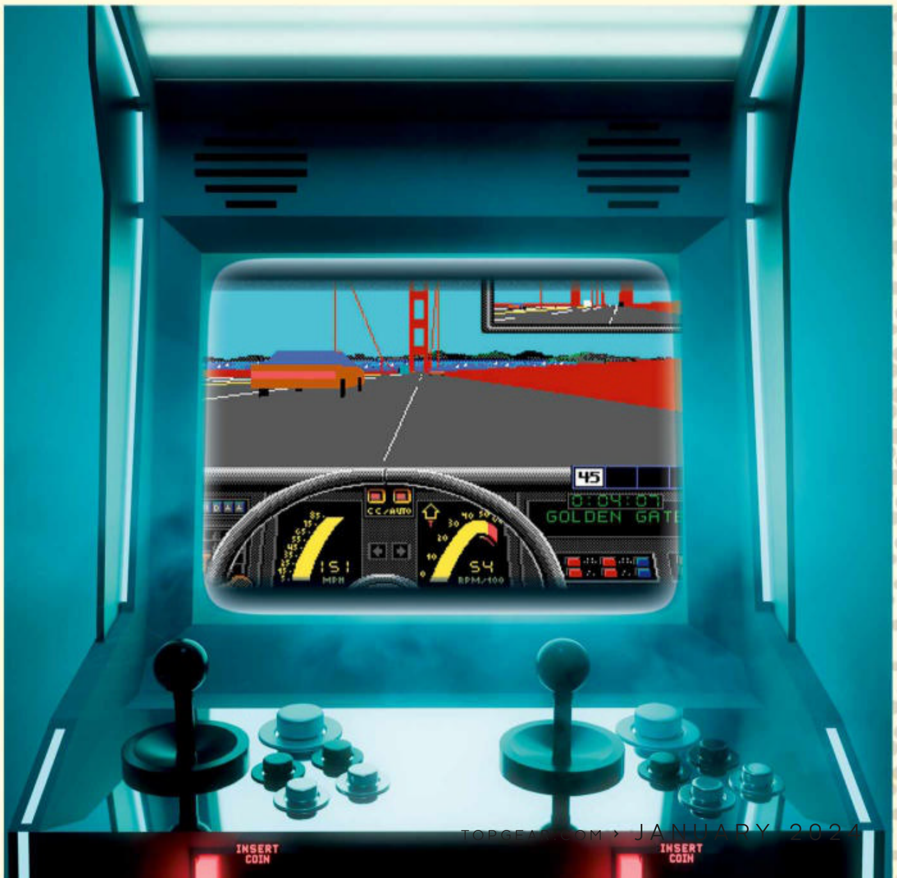
Vette!

PC, 1989

If we were to describe an upcoming driving game that featured a huge open world recreation of San Francisco, traffic to avoid, a realistic damage model that affected engine performance and handling, police chases, an interior view with accurately modelled dashboard and both single and multiplayer modes, you might very reasonably ask where you can place a preorder. Staggeringly, this is all stuff *Vette!* was doing back in 1989. Yes, the same year as the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Truly justifying the exclamation mark in its title, *Vette!* was an astonishing achievement for the time. Sharing similar flat polygonal graphics to 1989 stablemate *Hard Drivin'*, this game was arguably even more ambitious. While the titular Corvette may have been the main attraction, the digital version of San Francisco is the true star, including an approximation of the real road layout and even landmarks including the Golden Gate bridge, something that must have been spectacular in an era when New Kids on the Block were riding high in the charts.

Retrospectively, *Vette!* starts to look like a sort of proto-GTA, with its freedom to explore an open cityscape and what might have been a world first option to mow down pedestrians in a 3D environment. Fortunately we're not sure the tabloids even knew what a video game was in 1989. Mounting the pavement wasn't necessarily a *good* idea, though. Erratic driving of any sort was likely to attract the attention of the police but, in an inspired move, when caught the game presented a list of excuses to use. They ranged from 'I'm late for my son's birthday party', through 'I needed to find a bathroom, badly' to the rather more straightforward 'I'm test driving this Corvette'. Not that the last one has ever worked in our experience... **MIKE CHANNELL**



IMAGES: GETTY

DO/~~DON'T~~ MEET YOUR HEROES

BMW M5 (E39)

£52,000 (when new)

4.9 V8	394 bhp	4.8 secs	n/a mpg	1,795 kg

HERO From an age when BMWs looked dignified and didn't depend on modes

ZERO Most are quite leggy now and will need a suspension rebuild to feel sweet

ONE OF MY TEACHERS ONCE SPENT A while appealing for the class to make his evening marking marathons less dreary by enlisting a spot of 'revisionist' history. Basically, the academic dark art of challenging a long held assumption. Maybe Britain's World War One generals weren't hapless donkeys leading the lions. Perhaps they were applying tried and tested tactics to a world where new inventions like the machine gun and poison gas suddenly existed. You might argue the captain of the Titanic wasn't a foolhardy speed merchant toying with thousands of lives for the sake of newspaper headlines, but an experienced sailor following accepted protocol, when he steamed into an ice field at top speed.

See, it's fun to be a contrarian. To rip up the vested interests and entrenched cliches. To point out everyone is, in fact, wrong. Possibly – perish the thought – the E39 generation BMW M5 isn't the greatest super saloon of all time. Never meet your heroes and all that.

The third car to ever be called M5 was launched in 1999. I was eight. So I didn't really notice at the time, being preoccupied with Pokémon cards. It didn't register when it went out of production in 2004 either. But somewhere along the way, I began to notice that any of the E39 family was deified as some sort of four-door saloon god. The GOAT destroyed the competition when it was launched, still best in class when it was retired and (embarrassingly for Munich) roundly preferred to the pointier looking 5-Series that replaced it.

It's October 2024 when I finally get to meet it. It should feel hopelessly out of date: only 400bhp in a super saloon. Audi and Mercedes hatchbacks have more these days. A manual gearbox! No adaptive dampers. Apple WhatPlay? Nestled in the armrest, a tiny flip phone cradle. Hello Moto.

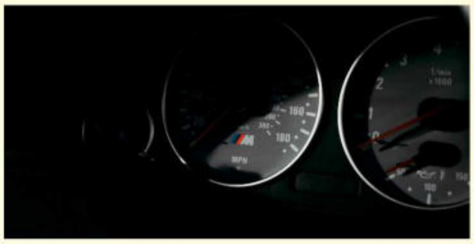
Charmingly primitive then. But there's innovation too. To stop you losing the key, or having it rattle around in the console, there's a clever holder built into the steering column. Twist it, and it even starts the V8. Genius.

And what a V8. M's first, revving to 7,500rpm (when the iconic clear dials' yellow warmup lights extinguish), making an expensive, malevolent rumble and so much torque you can depart junctions in fourth. At 1.8 tonnes, this M5 is not a light car even by today's standards. But did I miss turbos? Or hybrid boost strategy? Give over. Oh, and during our dreamy week together it never averages less than 20 to the gallon.

WORDS: OLLIE KEW PHOTOS: OLGUN KORDAL

> **“THE E39 DEMONSTRATES HOW ONE SORTED SETUP TRUMPS A MENU OF ARGUMENTATIVE OPTIONS”**

No prizes for guessing how much horsepower is under the bonnet here



So I loved the engine and the slightly leggy gearshift with its illuminated top. But what I’ve been yearning for since is a performance car that rides this well. This the last German performance car to exist before the pre-eminence of modes. The beautifully balanced, endlessly friendly, gorgeously supple E39 demonstrates in a few hundred metres how one sorted setup usually trumps a menu of argumentative options.

Is it BMW insecurity or car buying society’s taste for extreme status symbols that means M can’t build a car like this today? Something so elegantly discreet but deeply well engineered? People who write about cars long to find the missing link between cars of yesterday and today. I couldn’t honestly say I found much that relates a modern M car to this peak. Slightly dead steering (albeit via a steering wheel design for the human hand) aside, it’s a car built to an entirely different set of principles.

Dammit. I’ve become once of those nostalgists. “Everything was better in the old days.” I think that’s blinkered, and I’m fond of modern Ms like the M3 Touring and M2. But it leaves me a little bereft that now I’ve met the E39, it’ll go down as the best super saloon I’ve ever driven. Hopefully something will challenge that assumption one day.

DRIVEN

HEAD TO HEAD

VAUXHALL GRANDLAND vs FORD EXPLORER

These two brands have been the 'pile it high, sell it cheap' kings of the UK market for decades, but their new core models take a very different tack...

WORDS PAUL HORRELL **PHOTOGRAPHY** OLIVER BROOKWELL

Celtic versus Rangers, MacOS vs Windows, Yorks vs Lancs… the age old rivalries of the big beasts. And Ford versus Vauxhall: these pages have always been filled with face-offs of Focuses and Astras, STs and GSis, Fiestas and Corsas. In the light of which, lining up their most recent mainstream family cars is our routine duty. But of course things have changed. For a start Ford's and Vauxhall's mainstream family cars, if bought on company car schemes, are electric crossovers now. So here are the Explorer and Grandland. But the tectonic plates have shifted in other directions too. Ford and Vauxhall aren't really the big beasts any longer. Volkswagen is comfortably the top selling brand in Britain, leaving Ford and Vauxhall to be beaten both by 'exclusive' players BMW and Audi, and relative newcomer Kia.

Result is our former giants now have to take the obvious cost-cutting measure of shared platforms. Under the Grandland's skin is parent company Stellantis' STLA Medium kit of parts, as per the Peugeot e-3008. Ford had to look outside the family, alighting on the VW ID's basic components. These days there's a lot that can be done with tuning to make related cars feel different. And a lot that can't.

So industry spreadsheets say these aren't the two most important cars of their kind. Yet a deeply ingrained folk memory says they are. Britain can't stop thinking about rep-piloted Mondeos and Vectras, and beloved family cars rolling off the lines at Ellesmere Port and Dagenham. The other day BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme did a piece on the state of electric car manufacturing here. It chose to interview the head of Ford of Britain, who pleaded for EV subsidies and implied Ford's cars are central to UK manufacturing. The interviewer failed to challenge her on the fact Ford hasn't built a car here for 22 years. Because everyone *still* assumes Ford and Vauxhall are the flag carriers. So sooner or later someone at the pub is going to ask you as a *TopGear* reader which new age car is better, the Ford or the Vauxhall. That's why we did this test.

The Explorer and Grandland do the same job. We're testing them in their single motor versions. For the Ford, that's RWD, a handy 286bhp, and a 77kWh battery. The Vauxhall is FWD with a meeker 213bhp and a 73kWh battery. The range by comparable but unrealistic WLTP measure is 358 miles for the Ford and 325 for the Vauxhall. If you're nervous and don't mind spending for lithium you'll likely seldom use, there's a 435-mile version of the Grandland coming. As compensation for the lesser power and range than the Ford, the Vauxhall is more than 10 per cent cheaper when you adjust for kit.

Ford actually has a pair of closely related family electric SUVs, and both resuscitate names from the

WHAT ABOUT THESE?

TESLA MODEL Y LONG RANGE

Blobby design encloses huge cabin and double boot. Supercharging gives extra reassurance. Hard ride, polarising interface (and CEO)

£46,990

NISSAN ARIYA EVOLVE FWD 87kWh

Beautiful lounge room interior, and quite fun for the driver. Ride's a bit firm though. Wide choice of versions, but not all that efficient

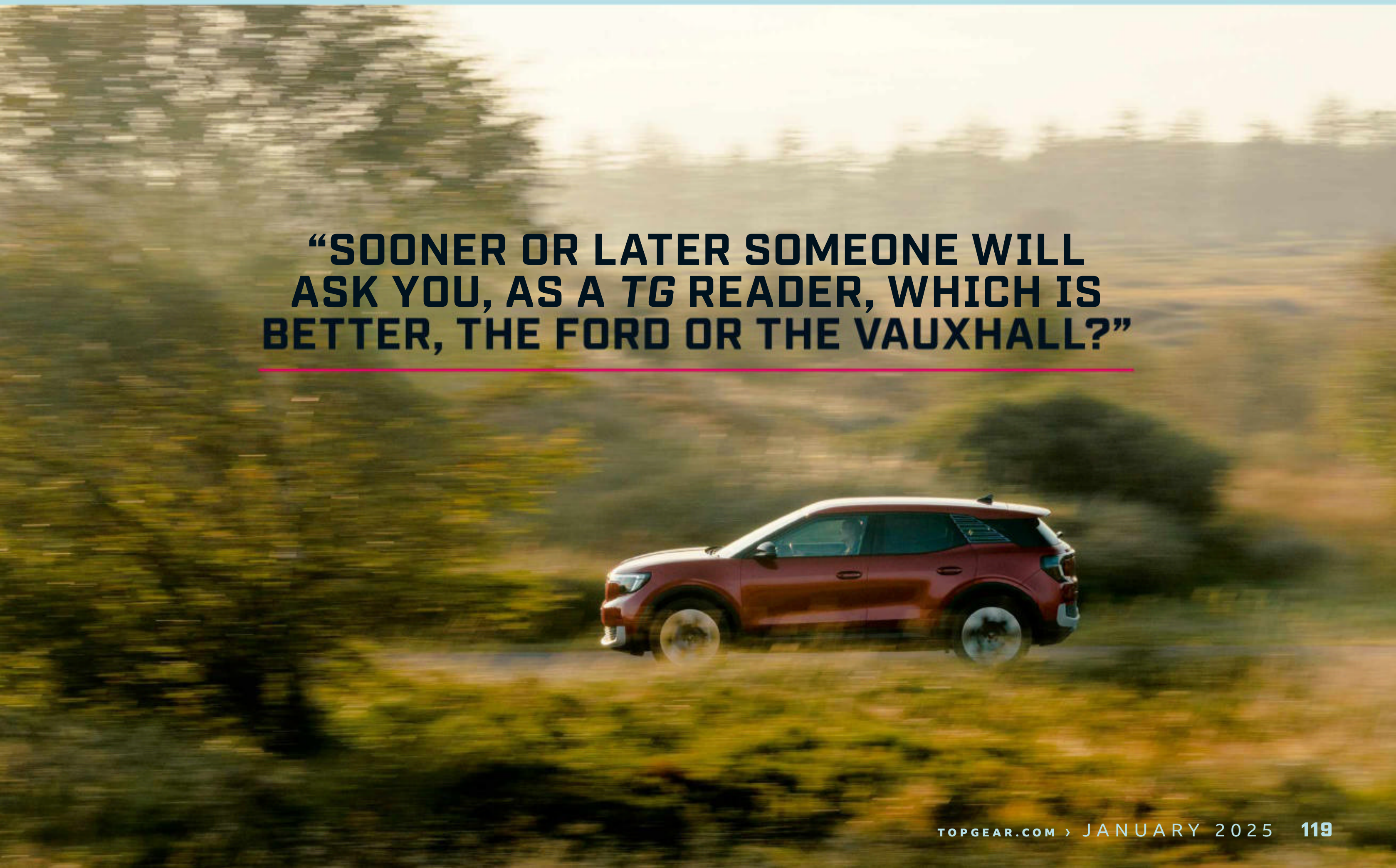
£48,145

CUPRA TAVASCAN V1 77kWh

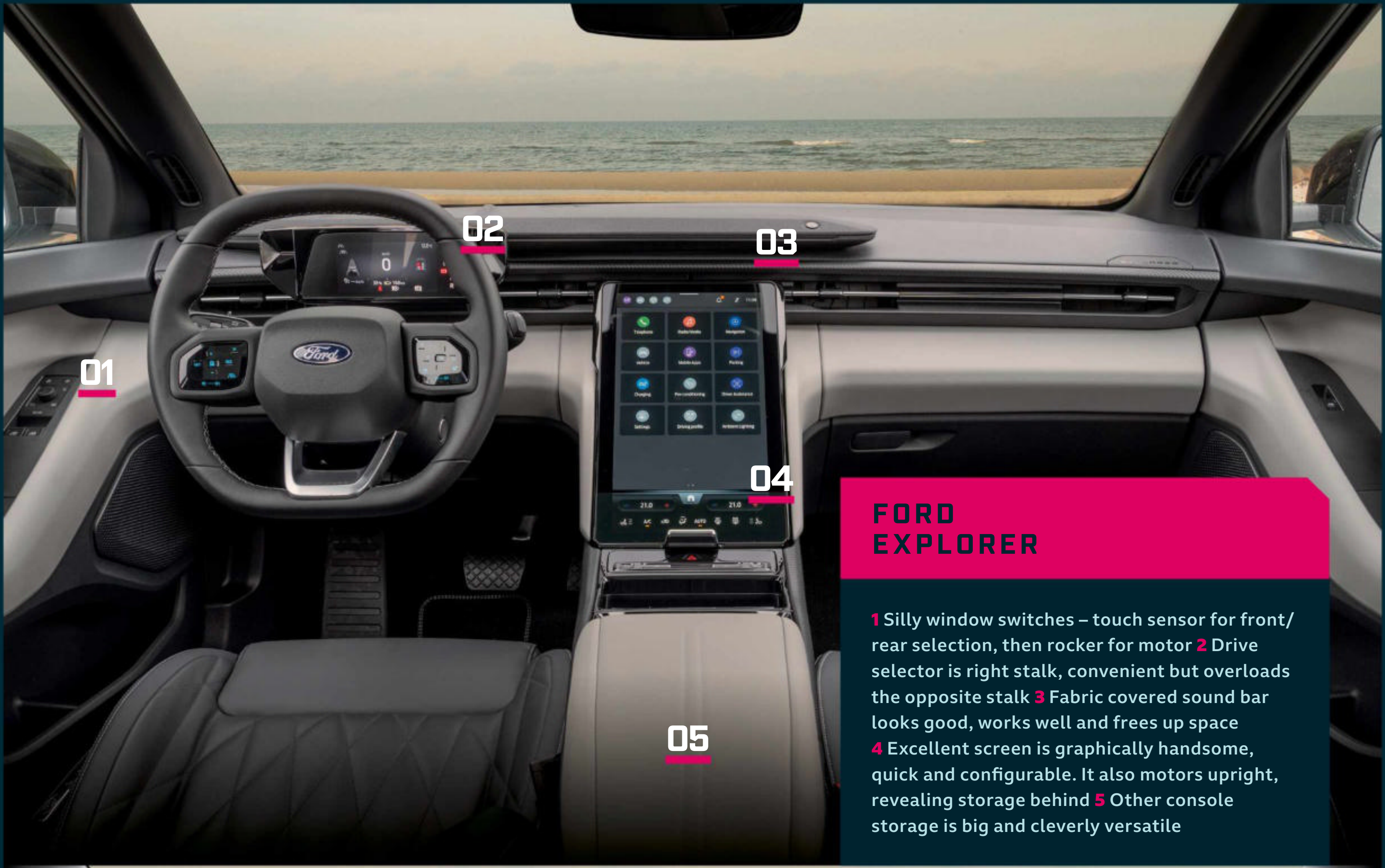
The other best VW MEB-based crossover. Looks sportier than the Ford. Not that well equipped – heat pump and heated seats are in a winter pack

£47,340

The Ford's really a VW, and the Vauxhall's an Opel. No, Peugeot. Huh?

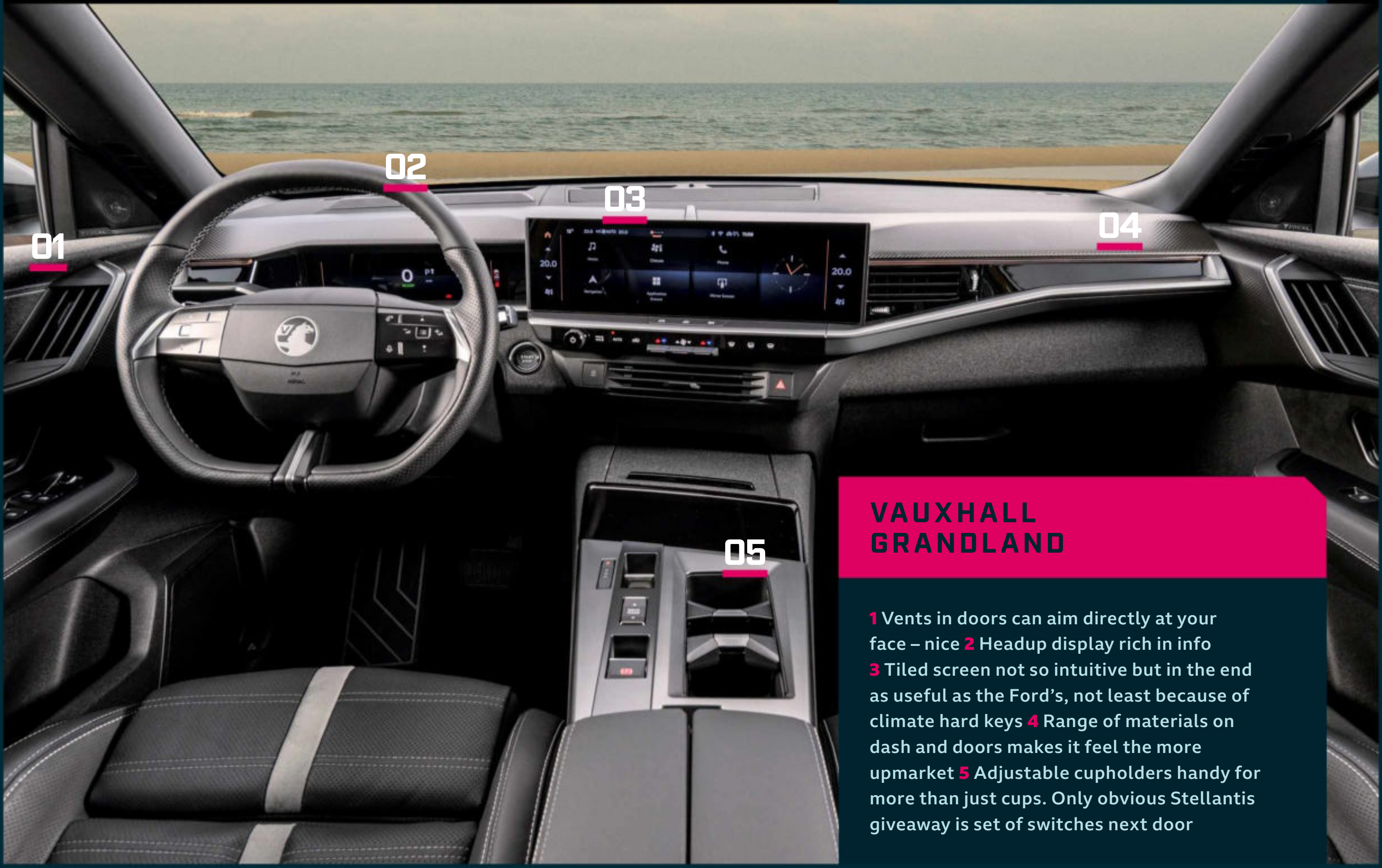


“SOONER OR LATER SOMEONE WILL ASK YOU, AS A *TG* READER, WHICH IS BETTER, THE FORD OR THE VAUXHALL?”



FORD EXPLORER

1 Silly window switches – touch sensor for front/rear selection, then rocker for motor **2** Drive selector is right stalk, convenient but overloads the opposite stalk **3** Fabric covered sound bar looks good, works well and frees up space **4** Excellent screen is graphically handsome, quick and configurable. It also motors upright, revealing storage behind **5** Other console storage is big and cleverly versatile



VAUXHALL GRANDLAND

1 Vents in doors can aim directly at your face – nice **2** Headup display rich in info **3** Tiled screen not so intuitive but in the end as useful as the Ford's, not least because of climate hard keys **4** Range of materials on dash and doors makes it feel the more upmarket **5** Adjustable cupholders handy for more than just cups. Only obvious Stellantis giveaway is set of switches next door

ICE age. The Capri is on p125 and it's the slightly slinky one. Whereas the Explorer leans, visually at least, into the blocky heritage of the American truck its badge invokes. We're even seeing even a bit of F-150 Lightning in its face. The Grandland also has a weighty two box outline, but crisp pressing lines on its sides and a lighter touch to its exterior details give it a more car-like look. Oddly, in small photos it looks just like the old Grandland, but when it's actually stood before you, its design is a big step on.

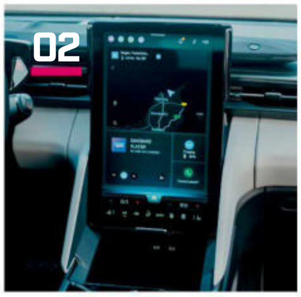
Inside, the Grandland is an even more significant change from the old, with a shift to angular, horizontal definition and trendier materials including cloth on door tops and dash, and some brazenly fake but not unpleasant carbon fibre-ish weave. This Ultimate trim gets a pair of widescreens with twinkly graphics, and although the Stellantis operating system isn't too intuitive when first you meet it, after a while it can be configured to a layout that brings most people's individual priorities to the fore. That's even though the Vauxhall lacks the related Peugeot's i-Toggle shortcuts. Physical keys get you to the home and the driver assist screens. Another set of hard keys cover all main climate functions except the one I use most often, air distribution. But props to the Grandland for putting its outer air vents in the doors, so fresh air blows on the driver's face not knuckles. The top spec also gets you a very informative HUD, which is just as well as the driver display doesn't make very good use of its pixels.

Still, its driver display is bigger than the Explorer's, which makes do with the famously minimal VW one. It does however swap out VW's touchscreen for a really big Ford-specific one. It's straightforward to use, legible, usefully configurable and generally a model of logic. Or at least its logic corresponds with the operating system of my own brain – one must recognise these things are personal. That screen also pivots electrically so you can make it more streamlined and discreet, or higher and more reachable. The 'transmission' selector (it's actually the motor control of course) is a stalk on the right of the wheel, leaving the dip switch, wipers, washers and indicators to be crowded onto a single wand on the left. The main light switch is VW's confusing touch array, and Ford also uses VW's absurdly counterintuitive setup with two switches for four windows. Why couldn't Ford have binned those off? Skoda did.

Both cars have good front seats and driving positions. The three people in the back of the Ford will be happier than their oppos in the Vauxhall, because the Ford has usefully more legroom. On the other hand, the Vauxhall wins for boot space. Both boots have two-level floors so you can put mucky stuff underneath. For in-cabin storage, the Ford wins as its various cubbies are a bit bigger. And they perform extra tricks including a cupholder bin affair that can go up top or down by your shins, and a hidden bin behind the central screen that motors shut and locks when the car's locked.

We've often moaned about the weight of cars spun off this VW Group platform, and the Ford is a portly 2,090kg. But the Vauxhall is more, if by a negligible one per cent. Yet the Grandland manages to feel the lighter of the pair. Its featherweight steering, too light for us, is the beginning of that impression. Also the suspension has a quick pace to its primary bounce, almost like a supermini. That steering needs a bit of getting used to though. It's fine out on the dual carriageway, stable at the straight ahead, but wind on a little lock and it gets surprisingly quick, darting the car into a bend. That adds to the superficial sense of agility. (Different, by the way, from the Peugeot e-3008's gentler setup.) The frequency selective dampers do a pretty sound job of containing big body motions, but there's sometimes some busy

ITS ALL IN THE DETAILS



1 Don't worry, the one you buy gets a Vauxhall badge and lettering **2** Here's the Ford's screen set to its upright position with storage behind **3** Vauxhall has a motor under bonnet, Ford has less excuse for lack of froot **4** Vauxhall is wrapped in the more interesting cabin materials **5** And its seats felt better to us too **6** Ford does better for rear space but Vauxhall has the bigger boot

SPECIFICATIONS

	WINNER **FORD EXPLORER** SELECT EXTENDED RANGE RWD	**VAUXHALL GRANDLAND**	**TESTER'S NOTES**
PRICE	£45,875 OTR (£49,525 as tested)	£45,195 OTR (£47,195 as tested)	
POWERTRAIN	Rear electric motor, 77kWh battery	Front electric motor, 73kWh battery	*Both use permanent-magnet synchronous motors. Optional front motor on the Ford. Vauxhall platform also allows two motor 4WD but no sign Grandland will offer it*
TRANSMISSION	Single speed, RWD	Single speed, FWD	*None of your fancy twin ratio electric car transmissions here. The cost and weight implications are simply not worth it*
TOTAL POWER	286bhp	213bhp	*Pedal calibration has an effect too. Vauxhall's is a bit antsy at low speed in max sport mode with max regen. But who uses that combo in town?*
TOTAL TORQUE	412lb ft	254lb ft	*Extra kick from Ford's motor paired with well-calibrated suspension gives it a more engaging lively sense of cornering balance*
0-62mph	6.4secs	9.0secs	*Their weight is to all intents and purposes a match, so stronger Ford motor has the expected effect. Plus, if it's slippery the RWD will find you more traction*
TOP SPEED	112mph	106mph	*Because drive is single speed, motors reach their max usable revs soon after 100mph. High speeds hammer range anyway*
CLAIMED RANGE/ WLTP EFFICIENCY	374 miles/ 4.3mpkWh	325 miles/ 3.5mpkWh	*Efficiency and range show Vauxhall doesn't make such good use of its electrons, at least not if you drive like the WLTP technician*
WEIGHT	2,090kg	2,120kg	*VW Group MEB platform as used by Ford is heavy compared with Tesla's or Renault/Nissan's. The Stellantis one is lardier again*
BOOTSPACE	470/1,422 litres	550/1,645 litres	*There's more space for rear passengers in the Ford, but more space for stuff in the back of the Vauxhall*
VERDICT	*Makes good use of the platform. Ford's managed to imbue it with dynamic polish – more so than the Mustang Mach-E actually – if not much actual engagement. Roomy and mostly ergonomic cabin help, but price is ambitious*	*Static qualities beat the Ford, it has more equipment for the money and nicer cabin trim materials. So it's justifiable for folk who care little about driving. But it's slower and the dynamics aren't as polished*	
SCORE	7	6	/10

secondary flutter, and overall the ride is pretty firm. Still, the suspension and tyres are quiet.

Because the Grandland's motor has a lot less torque than the Explorer's, traction isn't a problem. That of course is the issue – the Vauxhall is noticeably the slower of the pair, weaker in its pickup from any speed. Still, this is a family car, so you can't accuse it of being too feeble. More annoying is the brake pedal, which is overservoed and mushy so it's too easy to stand the car on its nose and spill the kids' drinks. If you use the paddles to ask for maximum regen, the accelerator gets quite twitchy in low speed manoeuvres.

So, yeah, the Ford does feel heavier. But it's more fluent and composed and mature with it. Its steering is weightier but always gives the response you're expecting. There's a subtle but noticeable RWD balance – not oversteer, just a sharing of effort with the rears doing the driving and the fronts the steering. It sits better on the road, and rolls more progressively. It's a subtly satisfying drive.

It also has more performance than the Grandland, arriving at 62mph in the same time as a Focus ST. The standard accelerator map is just fine – there's a sport calibration but it just front loads the pedal without any absolute improvement. Anyway, the Ford's suspension lets you make use of the extra power over the Grandland, getting along with less drama. The Ford's ride is a little busy at low speed, but get going and it's definitely less perturbed than the Vauxhall's. The brake pedal is artificial feeling but more progressive than the Vauxhall's and you can switch to adaptive regeneration that uses radar and navigation feeds to slow you when the car in front slows, or there's a junction upcoming.

Vauxhall/Opel's fruits of Stellantis buyout are starting to pay dividends

Both get a pretty comprehensive set of drive assists, so you can have lane centring and adaptive cruise control on slow moving suburban jams and motorways – though both their chassis hold course well at speed without electronic help. The Ford's lane departure prevention system often grabs the wheel when you're taking a perfectly sensible course on country roads, but you can set a shortcut to turn it off. Surround cameras also come with these specs, and that's a good thing given their thick pillars, high waists and likelihood of children blocking the rear window.

This test wasn't a particularly long distance, but we have masses of experience with the Ford's drivetrain and can confidently say it'll do 280 sanely driven motorway miles on a warmish day, and more on gentler roads. The Vauxhall would be 250 on the motorway. But a gotcha is that Ford asks extra for a heat pump that's standard on the Vauxhall. So an unequipped Explorer is likely to suffer more in winter. Peak charge power is slightly higher for the Vauxhall and its battery is slightly smaller so on a common 150kW post it'll be a few minutes quicker 10–80 per cent, getting it done in just under half an hour. But of course that 80 per cent will get you less far.

If you can stand the meeker performance and range, the Vauxhall looks cheaper. For this ultimate spec with matrix lights, pano sunroof, upgraded hi-fi, heat pump and 20s, it's £45,195. That lot on the Ford means the Premium trim at £49,975 plus two option packs adding £2,350.

We'd be happy with this Select trim for the Explorer. It's better to drive and quicker. It wins against the Grandland. That's settled the old binary battle of British adversaries. The industry back story is a little more coloured. Ford might sell a better Volkswagen, but Peugeot sells a better Vauxhall.

“THE FORD DOES FEEL HEAVIER. BUT IT'S MORE FLUENT AND COMPOSED AND MATURE WITH IT”

THE OVERRUN

Small but perfectly formed reviews. The best of this month's drives

SCAN QR CODES TO READ THE FULL REVIEW OF THAT CAR... OR THIS ONE TO READ THEM ALL!

FORD FOCUS ST EDITION

£42,905

WITH PRODUCTION SET TO STOP forever in November 2025, the Focus is nearing the end of its time. So think of this ST Edition as the last dance. It gets adjustable coilover suspension tuned by Ford Performance, oversized 363mm Brembo front brakes, alloys made using aerospace techniques – all the toys. It's staggering fun. And you'll shave 0.4secs off the school run. **JH**

		0–62 mph	P	CO₂
2.3T 4cyl	276 bhp	5.7 secs	34.9 mpg	189 g/km

RENAULT MEGANE E-TECH

£37,995

THE ALREADY EXCELLENT electric Megane is now better. Count the changes: a heat pump is now standard, the touchscreen is bigger and more user friendly, and 'contextual' adaptive cruise control (it'll slow down for junctions) is on all but the base trim. Oh, and it's *cheaper* too. To the tune of £500. Thanks Renault. Now get rid of that sponginess in the brake pedal and it'll be close to faultless. **JH**

		0–62 mph	vmax	
60 kWh	215 bhp	7.5 secs	99 mph	281 miles

LAMBO URUS SE

£207,999

FOR Looks and sounds great, amazing handling

AGAINST Bigger bandwidth risks confusing the car's vibe

CLEVER FACELIFT, THIS. THE BONNET'S BEEN REPROFILED AND there are reworked headlights for a more emollient overall look. The rear end sees the number plate moved to the lower part of the car, and redesigned tail-lights result in a striking tapered centre-peak graphic.

The big news here is the powertrain. The Urus SE combines the 4.0-litre twin turbocharged V8, rear-mounted e-motor and 25.9kWh battery that does such excellent work in the new Bentley Continental GT Speed and Porsche Cayenne. The combustion engine makes 612bhp on its own, aided by the e-motor's 189bhp, for a total of 789bhp (and 946lb ft).

There are 11 drive modes and the Urus SE can be both efficient or drifty thanks to a clever diff and variable clutch pack. It remains carlike to sit in despite its size, and feels better made and appointed than ever. **JB**

		0-62 mph		CO₂
4.0TT + e-motor	789 bhp	3.4 secs	136 mpg	51 g/km

LEAPMOTOR T03

£15,995

		0-62 mph	vmax	
37.3 kWh	94 bhp	12.7 secs	81 mph	165 miles

EVER HEARD OF LEAPMOTOR? It's a rapidly successful Chinese brand trying its luck in Europe in a joint effort with Stellantis. We get two cars to start, the unconvincing C10 D-segment SUV and this, a city EV. The mainstream abandoned these for profit reasons (ie there was none), but Leapmotor reckons people still want 'em. It might be right. Scan the QR code for more. **JH**

HYUNDAI INSTER 02

£26,745

		0-62 mph	vmax	
49 kWh	115 bhp	10.6 secs	93 mph	223 miles

THE INSTER HAS A TRICKLED down version of the Kona's faithful electric drive, with smaller battery and gentler motor. Not the cheapest baby EV but it has the full suite of screens, assists and actual switches. Higher spec 02 has sliding rear seats so you can run it as a roomy urban limo, but with a miniscule boot. Refined and comfy, but not quite as cheery to drive as it looks. **PH**

7/10

BMW M5

£111,405 (£113,405 Touring)

FOR Very fast, very capable, confident. Now with added electric capability

AGAINST Overabundance of control systems/shiny lights. Not a hotrod

4.4TT V8 + e-motor	727 bhp	3.5 secs	27.4 mpg	39 g/km

TO THE POINT: THE NEW BMW M5 IS AN excellent car. It's very fast, confident, endlessly configurable and now offers a not inconsequential 40ish miles of electric only running for happy tax returns. There's a 195bhp electric motor spawned into the middle of the 8spd auto that uses the mechanical gearing for max efficiency, a total system output – when you include the bi-turbo, 4.4-litre V8 – of 727bhp and 737lb ft. Unsurprisingly, it's brutally accelerative even in slippery conditions, thanks to rear biased all-wheel drive and enough traction management systems to anchor a ship. It's intelligent and capable in so many ways. And yet it misses the mark as an M5. Part of the problem is weight. At getting on for 2.5 tonnes, the M5 has to manage its own bulk, and it does so brilliantly. But somewhere in the back of your reptilian brain – especially on a long corner or a flick-flack of curves – you're still aware of that fact. It weighs more than the electric i5 M60. More than an E70 X5 SUV with a last gen but similar V8. It can eke traction from a mud washed German back lane and fire down an autobahn with high speed, distance stomping ease, but you'll know.

But that's not all. The M5 is awash with extra functionality. Five drivetrain configurations if you option the M Driver's package (which adds another pair on top of the standard three), Road, Sport and Track modes, plus a setup menu that allows you to change everything from the noise and the traction intervention level, to the feel of the brake pedal. It all works, has a defined effect, but it feels like it's drooping under its own weight. You can plumb the shortcut buttons, but there's so much adjustability, you get the feeling that there'll be no Goldilocks 'just right' moment.

An example. There's 'Boost control' which maxes out all the systems for fast overtakes by holding the left hand gearchange paddle for more than a second, at which point the headup display screams "BOOST" and flashes. Back in the day, that used to be called 'kickdown' and something you got simply by pressing the accelerator firmly. Even the pops and bangs from the exhaust are depressingly regular with the V8 noise in the cabin plumbed in and digitised. From the outside, it's just not very noisy. It's understandable how this car has turned out given brutal emissions regulations, but it feels like the M5's edge is duller than before, if not actually slower.

Oddly, the Touring feels slightly more suited to the format. It's not that much bigger than the saloon in terms of raw space – the saloon has an enormous boot at 466 litres, the Touring only

managing 500 – but it's a more practical space with a hatchback. And there's something about an ultra secure, mega powerful estate that chimes more easily. You won't mess with the settings as much, but it feels very solid. Or maybe our supertouring bias is showing.

The issue here is somewhat to do with the weight of history. In isolation, this is a meaty 5-Series range topper. Perhaps forthcoming special editions in the usual vein of BMW model ranges will fix things. But an M5 was always about being a hotrod clothed in a relatively subtle body. A car for 'if you know, you know' moments. This isn't one of them. **TF**

M5 Touring gains approx 45kg over the saloon

7/10

FORD CAPRI PREMIUM AWD

£56,175

79 kWh	340 bhp	5.3 secs	112 mph	346 miles

WE CAN BICKER OVER WHETHER OR NOT IT'S A Capri. More relevant is that under the panels it's an Explorer (page 114). Same dash and cabin, similar seats, little loss of rear headroom. Drives largely the same too. Actually it's slightly lowered and the chassis recalibrated and ESC sport mode added. The difference is subtle, and the Explorer was already good… for a mainstream EV crossover. We tested the AWD version, but RWD is lighter so little slower, and goes further. **PH**

6/10

MINI COUNTRYMAN ELECTRIC SE ALL4

£47,180

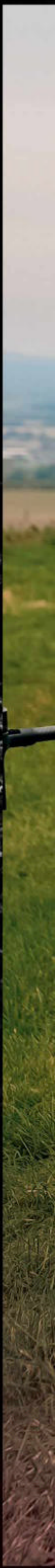
64.6 kWh	309 bhp	5.6 secs	112 mph	262 miles

THE NEW COUNTRYMAN IS THE BIGGEST MINI ever, and you can now have it in SE All4 spec with a twin motor electric powertrain. Despite its size and two-tonne kerbweight it drives rather nicely with direct steering and a handy turn of pace. The ride is too firm for a family SUV though and we still can't get on with that chunky steering wheel. It's not cheap either – both of the trim levels you want top £50k. Stick with the single motor Countryman E for more range and the same funky interior. **GP**

GARAGE

INCLUDING

ALFA ROMEO STELVIO · VOLKSWAGEN ID.7 · CUPRA BORN · RICCI'S GARAGE · LOVED AND LOST: MINI 1275 · GENESIS GV60 · PROJECT CORNER: TRIUMPH HERALD PT 3



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GOODBYE

ALFA ROMEO STELVIO QV

£87,195 OTR/£94,245 as tested/£897 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:
In a German-dominated world of über SUVs, why go for the upstart Italian?

DRIVER: Charlie Rose

AS WE BID FAREWELL TO THE Alfa Romeo Stelvio Quadrifoglio, I've been reflecting on just how far SUVs have come. Growing up in 1990s Britain, if your family needed space, an estate car was the answer. Land Rovers (really the only 'SUV' option back then) were used by the royals to potter around their grand estates, were they not? The thought of people using such a vehicle for the school run was absurd. Even more absurd was to imagine such a vehicle having 500bhp... yet here I am, having spent six months behind the wheel of the Quadrifoglio, and I totally get it.

Above everything else, the Stelvio's V6 steals the show. It's wildly spirited and borderline unhinged... in a good way. The Jaguar F-Pace SVR's thunderous V8 was a worthy rival, but it simply lacked that same fizz of the Alfa.

The Stelvio has been a fantastically practical companion for *TopGear* video shoots too. The boot offers ample space for all the gear, and it's quick enough to chase down supercars for those famous killer shots.

But even off duty, it's been a commendable family car. While I was initially very aware of the firm ride, it never left me feeling uncomfortable, even after long journeys. The whole car is surprisingly easy to live with, even when you turn things up in dynamic mode – the ability to soften off the active suspension with the touch of a button keeps it bearable on rougher roads.

Despite the Stelvio's Italian origins and Alfa's reputation for unpredictability, the Quadrifoglio has been mechanically solid throughout my time with it. The only issues have been a few minor gremlins with the infotainment, but nothing a quick 'off and on' didn't fix.

On the inside, underneath the bits of carbon trim, it's hard to ignore that the Stelvio's interior lacks the polish of its rivals. But I can turn a blind eye to that because those aluminium paddles are the best in the business.

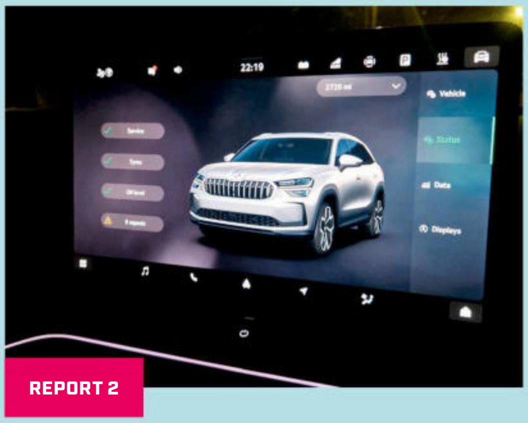
What about public perception? Well, the Stelvio definitely turns heads. Some people say, "Proper cool colour that," while others give disapproving looks, perhaps due to the antisocial growl from the Akrapovič exhaust. But that's part of its charm. In a world where cars are increasingly sanitised, it's refreshing to drive something with this much personality.

Alfa really has succeeded in making an SUV that'll never fail to put a smile on your face. And with Porsche's new Macan going electric, it's safe to say plenty of others will follow suit. The days of fast 'n' loud performance SUVs like the Stelvio Quadrifoglio are likely numbered. So, enjoy it while you can, it's a big thumbs up from me.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 2891cc twin-turbo V6, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 512bhp, 443lb ft, 0–62mph in 3.9secs, 176mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,830kg
ECONOMY: 28.8mpg, 227g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 6,760 **OUR MPG** 19.5



REPORT 2

SKODA KODIAQ iV SE L

£44,635 OTR/£47,960 as tested/£516 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: All the car your family will ever need – but will you want for more?

DRIVER: Ben Pulman

THIS MONTH OUR KODIAQ HAS BEEN TO GUERNSEY, and to a Skoda dealer, with the latter visit due to it going wrong on the former.

Good stuff first – the Kodiaq's big battery took us from home in the New Forest, to the ferry in Poole, and then all around Guernsey on a long weekend, without running out of charge. It was only when disembarking back in Blighty that the engine fired up. In fact, bar when the little 1.5-litre occasionally bursts into life to keep itself ticking over, I've barely used the engine.

Anyway, there I was, all pleased with myself, driving around with zero emissions on that dinky little island when a warning flashed up as the Side Assist went kaput. Then the Light Assist went down, and by the end of a 15-second tantrum I'd also lost Lane Assist, Front Assist and the dynamic cornering lights. And no amount of turning the Kodiaq off and on again would make them go away.

I took it to Meadens Skoda, which cleared the faults and sent me on my way, and I've had no trouble from the safety stuff since. But what I have had is other new warnings, which briefly flash and disappear, with the messages as varied as a brake servo issue through to 'key not detected'. I'm told a software update is needed.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 1498cc 4cyl turbo petrol + e-motor, 25.7kWh battery, 6spd auto, FWD
PERFORMANCE: 201bhp, 258lb ft, 0–62mph in 8.4secs, 130mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,977kg
ECONOMY: 565mpg, 11g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR: 3,407 **OUR MPG:** 126.9

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HELLO

VOLKSWAGEN ID.7

£51,550 OTR/£52,030 as tested/£478 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE: To discover if VW has actually mastered electrification

DRIVER: *Jason Barlow*

IN ATTEMPTING TO EXECUTE ITS post-dieselgate mea culpa, VW moved hastily in its transition to electric. Too hastily. I've enjoyed aspects of IDs 3, 4 and the Buzz, but alongside all the good intentions you also got gremlins.

The ID.7 arrives as something of a corrective. As well as moving the company's electric model line upmarket it also aims to reignite the idea that VW, for so long the default choice, is inherently trustworthy.

One thing the ID.7 sure delivers is value. It has rivals like the BMW i5 and Mercedes EQE in its sights, but this car hits the road at £52,030 and undercuts them both considerably.

Our ID.7 is the Pro Match version with a 77kWh battery for which VW claims a fully charged range of 383 miles. With winter almost here, we'll see about that. It also has the most efficient version of VW's electric powertrain, which can now manage higher thermal loads as well as reducing friction in its single-speed gearbox. The motor is also the most powerful yet deployed by VW: in this car it makes 282bhp and 402lb ft, funnelled exclusively through the rear wheels. This bodes well.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: electric motor, 77kWh battery, RWD

PERFORMANCE: 282bhp, 402lb ft, 0-62mph in 6.5secs, 112mph

KERBWEIGHT: 2,172kg

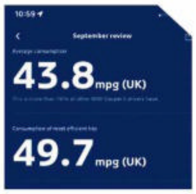
ECONOMY: 4.7 mpkWh, 383 miles

MILES SO FAR 1,120 **OUR MPKWH** 4.2

MINI COOPER S

Fuel burn a worry? Use 'Efficient' mode to show a happy hummingbird when cruising. Yippee

In fairness, near-45mpg at all times ain't bad: I regularly beat Mini's claimed 44.1mpg lab figure



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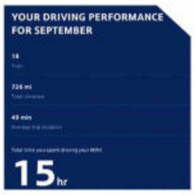
September review

43.8 mpg (UK)

49.7 mpg (UK)

Orwellian app doesn't miss a trick, and tuts when I've been in a rush. Hey, it's not my fault there was traffic!



YOUR DRIVING PERFORMANCE FOR SEPTEMBER

18

726 mi

49 min

15 hr

This was September. In October I did 1,200 miles, averaging 42mins a trip and spent 25hrs at the wheel

REPORT 4

MINI COOPER S

£26,700/£34,700/£376

WHY IT'S HERE: This might be the last stand of the petrol hot hatch

DRIVER: *Ollie Kew*

A NOTIFICATION PINGS INTO MY phone at the close of every month with the Cooper S. It cheerily tells me my latest driving report has been compiled and is ready for viewing in the Mini app. Oh, goodie. Parents' evening deja vu.

Wow, but it's detailed. The 'Efficiency Statistics' alert me that my average journey time in September was 49 minutes, and across that month the Mini's 2.0-litre engine burned 75.3 litres of fuel. Yikes, a three per cent rise in petrol use vs August. The app gets all red and angry with me. The shame!

Big Brother reassures me my September fuel consumption of 43.8 miles per gallon makes me more efficient than 76 per cent of other Mini Cooper S drivers contributing to the hive mind. Hah! Take that, community. Roll on my gold star.

SPECS

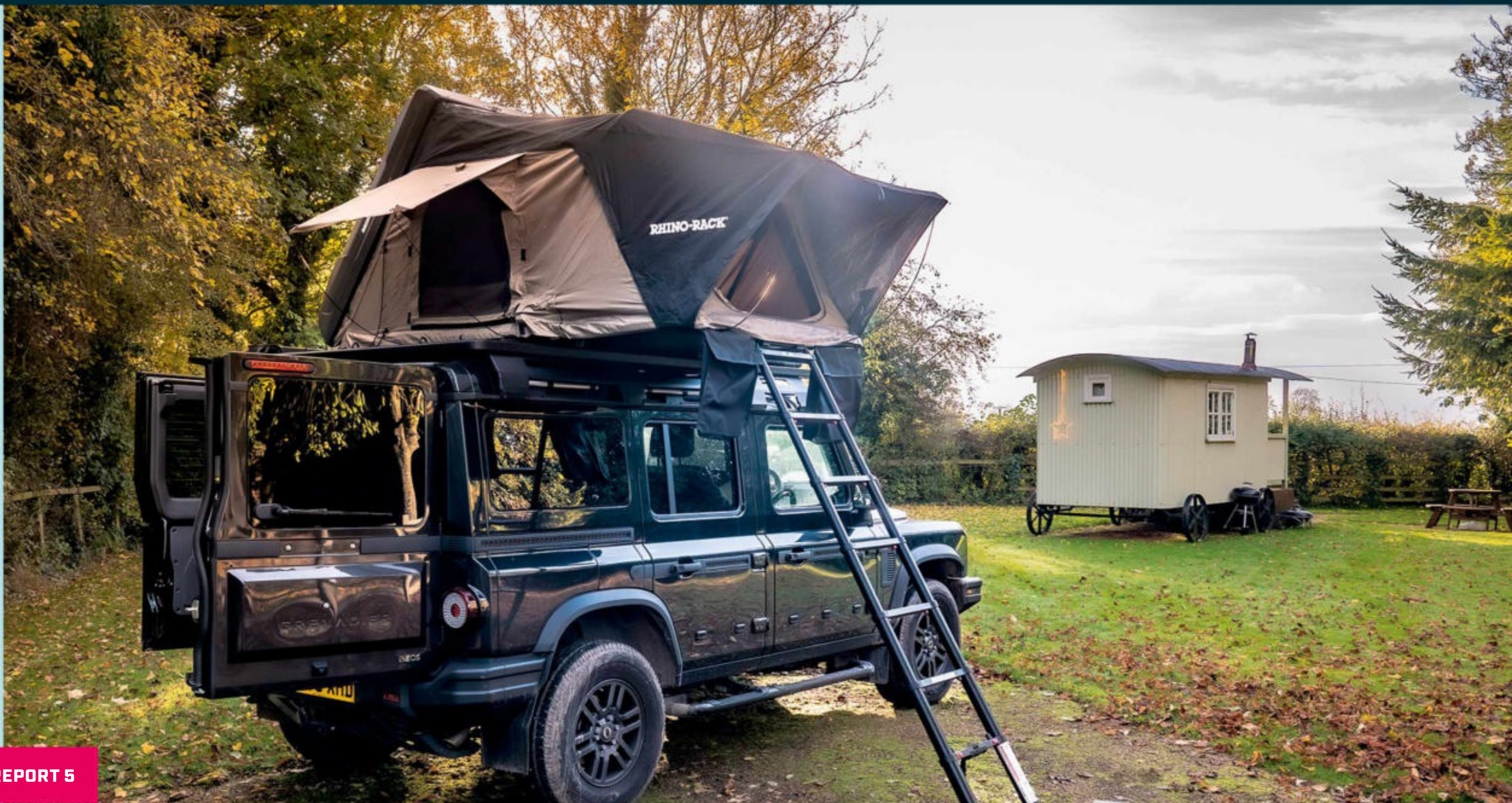
POWERTRAIN: 1998cc turbo 4cyl, FWD

PERFORMANCE: 198bhp, 221lb ft, 0-62mph in 6.6secs, 150mph

KERBWEIGHT: 1,360kg

ECONOMY: 44.1mpg, 144g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 5,220 **OUR MPG** 44.8



REPORT 5

"The more kit I fit to the Grenadier, the more sense it makes"

INEOS GRENADIER

£76,140 OTR/£79,481 as tested/£1,141 pcm

WHY IT'S HERE:

Does a utilitarian off-roader work as a lifestyle vehicle?

DRIVER: *Ollie Marriage*

I COULD HAVE SLEPT IN A shepherd's hut. There would have been fewer steps to negotiate. But no, have roof tent, must use it. It was part of the reason for going to Yorkshire and Northumberland, a few autumnal nights away to test the new tent and awning.

Yep, the Grenadier now seems to have sprouted enough outdoors kit to make Bear Grylls envious. And you know what, the more kit I fit to the Grenadier, the more sense it makes. It does lend itself fearsomely well to the role of being an adventure truck.

So let's go through what's on top. 1) Spare wheel. Because the back door looks better without it and is lighter to shut. 2) Storage box. Waterproof and lockable case, but hard to get at. 3) Roof tent. Magic piece of kit, really nicely made. 4) Awning. Again, great quality and easy to use. 5) Lightbar. Because lightbars make everything better. Especially when you have to flick chunky switches on the overhead console to operate it.

The tent was no issue to erect. Release two latches and the lid rises, then you pull out the ladder and use the leverage to flip over the floor and raise the tent. A few metal rods insert to hold the window awnings in place.

I slept tight up top that night. Yes, the rain drilled against the hard case, but inside that's insulated with a quilted lining and the tent material is thicker, tougher, more canvas-like than other roof tents I've used.

Rhino Rack is an Australian brand. In Australia this tent costs £1,865. UK prices aren't easy to come by at the moment – importing might be your best bet.

This added weight up top has made the Grenadier's cornering even more ponderous, which isn't ideal. But fuel economy doesn't seem to have suffered much – I get around 23–24mpg – tolerable. Just.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 2993cc 6cyl TT diesel, 4WD
PERFORMANCE: 245bhp, 405lb ft, 0-62mph in 9.9secs, 99mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,740kg
ECONOMY: 32.5mpg, 291g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 8,887 **OUR MPG** 22.6

THANKS TO WOLDS EDGE HOLIDAY LODGES

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REPORT 3

AUDI RS7 PERFORMANCE

£116,200 OTR/£122,250 as tested/£1,490 pcm
WHY IT'S HERE: Why is our new Audi RS7 Performance such a hit with the public?
DRIVER: *Ollie Kew*

USUALLY IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO spend much time in the RS7. As a powerful international businessman of business, its regular keeper Rowan normally lives in it, chairing conference calls like the BBC's Les Grossman. But while he was overseas I pinched it for a comparison with Porsche's latest Taycan Turbo S.

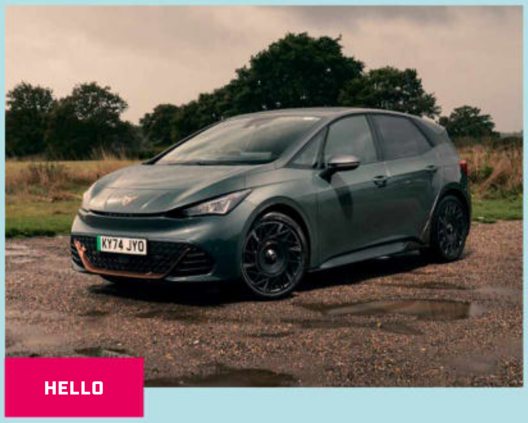
Parked alongside each other, the RS7 and Taycan made an attractive comparison. Both are long, four-pillarless-door liftbacks. Usually I loathe massive grilles on cars – the auto design equivalent of gold monogrammed gates outside your house – but the sneering, glowering RS7 made the Mission E lookalike Taycan look meek. Pity the RS7 rides dorkily high. The Porsche hunkers down on its wheels. For a 'four door coupe' the Audi is surprisingly tall, and its driving position feels like a Q7 when you've grown used to shaving cats eyes in the snake-low Porsche.

The real clincher is the facelifted Taycan has a £6k option called Active Ride Control – it uses electronically actuated high voltage dampers to give sublime ride comfort. The wheels float over scars in the road like a cartoon character hitching a ride on a cloud. Its witchcraft erases speed bumps, as if there's a blade slicing them off before they bother the chassis. It's a horrid phrase, but ARC is a gamechanger. The RS7 now feels old fashioned.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: 3996cc TT V8, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 621bhp, 627lb ft, 0–62mph in 3.4secs, 174mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,065kg
ECONOMY: 22.6mpg, 283g/km CO_2

MILES SO FAR 3,264 **OUR MPG** 20.4



HELLO

CUPRA BORN

£44,625 OTR/£46,697 as tested/£442 pcm
WHY IT'S HERE: Can this livened up EV prove that electric hot hatches are worth a go?
DRIVER: *Greg Potts*

"BLIMEY, LOOK AT THE WHEELS." I CAN'T TELL YOU how many times I've heard that since this car arrived. We're told that VZ stands for Veloz (the Spanish word for speedy), and that it will be used to mark all of Cupra's hot iterations from now on.

The Born VZ still only gets a single motor powering its rear axle, but that motor is much more powerful with 322bhp as opposed to the standard car's 227bhp. There's 402lb ft of torque too and a claimed 0–62mph time of 5.6 seconds, all numbers that put the Born VZ firmly into the modern hot hatch window.

The good news for me (without any access to home charging) is that the VZ also has a new, bigger battery. You see, the entry level Born comes with a 59kWh unit for 264 miles of range. With the posher V3 trim you can up that to a 77kWh battery that'll allow for 342 miles on a charge, but the VZ gets a 79kWh slab under the floor for a claimed 366 miles between top-ups. Should be useful.

Having had plenty of previous run-ins with recent VW Group infotainment systems, I'll also be interested to see how the updated 12in screen works. Let's hope it behaves. At £44,625 before options, the Born VZ isn't exactly a budget performance car. Lots to prove...

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: Single electric motor, RWD, 79kWh battery
PERFORMANCE: 322bhp, 402lb ft, 0-62mph in 5.6secs, 124mph top speed
KERBWEIGHT: 1,999kg
ECONOMY: 4.1mpkWh, 366 miles

MILES SO FAR 148 **OUR MPKWH** 3.4

Ricci's GARAGE

REPORT 53

THIS MONTH: MARK OFFERS UP AN ODE TO VOLK RACING WHEELS

Back in 2001 – while driving north to the Isle of Skye – my parents were keen to demonstrate the fancy capabilities of our Volvo XC90 which had screens in the headrests.

What wasn't considered was any actual material to watch, so the first few hours of this journey were spent staring blankly at said screens. Then, while stopping for fuel, I asked mum if we could get a DVD to watch (still relatively new tech at this point). Being car obsessed from a young age led me straight to a DVD with a bright yellow Impreza on the cover.

Max Power: Beasts from the East. Anyone who knows the history of *Max Power* understands this is far from family viewing, but amazingly this particular DVD was in fact car based and relatively factual. Even by today's standards it's a brilliant insight into Japanese car culture, despite first being launched on VHS in 1999. And while it left my parents completely perplexed, it would shape my automotive obsession for decades to come.

My first car, a white EK Civic, was made to replicate the Top Fuel EK9 featured on this film. Isao Mizota – who drives Ab Flug's Mazda RX7 early on – is now a friend of mine. From 2004–2010 I even worked on *Max Power*, and when I finally visited Japan in 2017 a visit to Top Secret and Veilside were high on the list of things to do right away.

I've owned Civics, Skylines, an Evo, a 200SX and multiple RX-7s in the past 20 years. And every single one has shared a common trait triggered by that DVD all those years back… they've all been sat on the most honourable of honourable Volk Racing wheels. For over 50 years Rays Engineering (which manufactures Volk Racing) has produced some of the best looking wheels in existence, from OEM designs like the R35 GT-R right through to the world of Formula One. Its wheels don't just look good, they're built with actual motorsport purpose too.

My first R32 Skyline sat on Volk TE37s, as did my R33 GT-R. I've had Gram Light 57DRs on an RX-7 along with TE37s and ZE40s. I've tried (and failed) to fit 17x9.5in SE37Ks on an old EK Civic, and most recently ran a set on an old Ferrari Challenge racecar. I can't decide if it's worrying or impressive, but I can decipher most TE37 fitments simply by their spoke design and PCD.

And it's this level of anorak that's why my current R34 GT-R is now on its third set of Volk Racing TE37 wheels – the TE37 Saga SL M-Spec to give them their full name. Essentially you're looking at a lighter, stronger version of an already light and super strong wheel. The finish is known simply as 'pressed black', and depending on what light you view them in, they appear to shift between an almost chrome-like finish to completely black. Both of which look brilliant against the Bayside Blue paintwork.

It's been 23 years since I inadvertently kicked off an obsession with Japanese cars, and I'd hoped by my late 30s this would've progressed into something a bit more sensible. But with the GT-R still in many pieces, a Pajero Evo boasting a blown engine and a horrid desire to (one day) build a four rotor RX-7, the phrase 'it has to get worse before it gets better' couldn't be more apt right now.

Renowned photographer Mark has been working with* TopGear *for many, many years. When not taking photos he's buying inappropriate cars. Here he shares his addiction with the world

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TOPGEAR.COM
FOR EXTENDED *TG* GARAGE REPORTS, AND TO EXPLORE THE ARCHIVE

REPORT 3

GENESIS GV60

£66,900 OTR/£74,855 as tested/£985 pcm
WHY IT'S HERE: Time to see if Genesis' only bespoke EV cuts the electric mustard
DRIVER: *TOM FORD*

CHARGING AN EV CAN BE ANNOYING. There's no queueing system for chargers, so if there are people waiting, that can be a serious point of friction. But I tend to just keep a bit of battery in reserve and move on if things are really busy. You do have to think about timings and mileages, but it really isn't that hard, and if you've got a regular commute you get to know where the decent chargers are. My wildly varying schedule doesn't allow for that all the time, but also proves that it can be done.

We also need weather protected chargers and cheaper public charging, but that's for another chat.

Cost? I can get charged at home and it works out at about 10p per mile (just for the electricity, not including the purchase price or running costs). A figure that gets knocked to the moon if charging at 77p per kWh public chargers too much.

But the GV60 makes having an electric car just that little bit easier by being an efficient, quick and convenient charging buddy. Plus, there have been some over-the-air convenience updates (like wireless CarPlay) which appeared overnight, though it did reset all my shortcut buttons...

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: dual electric motors, 77kWh battery, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 483bhp, 516lb ft, 0–62mph in 4.1secs, 146mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,145kg
ECONOMY: 3.2mpkWh, 289 miles

MILES SO FAR 5,981 **OUR MPKWH** 3.1

REPORT 3

BMW i5 TOURING

£79,355 OTR/£93,395 as tested/£1,274 pcm
WHY IT'S HERE: Is an XXL dad wagon still a versatility king when it's electric?
DRIVER: *ANDY FRANKLIN*

I DID A ROADTRIP IN THE i5 AS SOON AS I GOT IT. I wanted to get a trip in early to calm my range anxiety and get used to running an EV again. Plus, we all know range can vary through the year. Not a massive roadtrip, more a quick late summer getaway covering 200 miles one way. At the start the car showed a promising 300+ miles of range – could do it in one, but I chickened out. Watching the miles drop and not having the confidence yet, I stopped. Pathetic. This one happened to be a fast Shell charger at a Waitrose – I always go for the fast chargers, life's too short. Wasn't even the last stop – with no charger at my destination I wanted to arrive with decent range to start the week. I did manage to charge off a domestic plug while I was there, which charged quicker than I expected. After a few months with the i5 I now know I overreacted and should have trusted the BMW, knowing its range readout is reliable. That's if you don't drive like a tool (resist the boost button Andrew!), but this car is a cruiser as much as a workhorse, peaceful inside. I've found the satnav headup display a bit distracting but I'm pleased that my punt on a BMW EV is paying off. Though perhaps come the winter months, I'll be eating my words...

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: single electric motor, 81.2kWh battery, RWD
PERFORMANCE: 335bhp, 295lb ft, 0–62mph in 6.1secs, 120mph
KERBWEIGHT: 2,255kg
ECONOMY: 3.5mpkWh, 327 miles

MILES SO FAR 6,590 **OUR MPKWH** 3.1

REPORT 4

“Unusually, Tesla handles all the refurb work itself”

TESLA MODEL 3

£49,990 when new /£27,000 as tested

WHY IT’S HERE: Is a used Tesla just as good as a new one?

DRIVER: PAUL HORRELL

YOU MIGHT REMEMBER THIS Model 3 came to us secondhand, having gone through the Tesla Certified Pre-Owned programme. All manufacturers have an approved used scheme like that. What’s unusual about Tesla’s is that it handles all the refurb work itself, because it owns its own distribution system. And most of the work goes on at this centre in Longbridge.

After a wash, the incoming Teslas first get a body inspection, and all those dings are marked out in chinagraph pencil. Then it’s into the workshop and up on a ramp to check the running gear. Paintwork is tidied, small dents erased, electrics fixed and trim repaired or replaced. No surprise to see the most common parts to be swapped out are bumpers, wheels, screens and tyres. In that sense it’s easy being Tesla: the range of this stuff is far smaller than rivals’, so holding stock is a piece of cake.

Each car gets Enhanced Autopilot, whether or not it was specced when new. Out they roll with a one year extension to the original four year warranty. Alongside the workshop is a white photo cove so the website shows images of the actual car.

Batteries get a check, of course. People often say it’s a concern with used EVs. From new, ‘our’ car had an eight year, 120,000-mile guarantee of 70 per cent retained capacity. Tesla’s data almost never sees anything like that drop. A 250k Model S still registered 86 per cent, and the average of Model S and X is 88 per cent at 200,000 miles.

Used Model 3s start at around £20k. Choose from higher miles Long Range AWD or Standard Range with mileage in the 30s. It’s quite the pitch – 30 per cent down and about £180 a month. One like ours – 2021, AWD, 35k miles – would be £7.3k down and £220pcm over three years. And as we’re finding, it still acts pretty much like new.

SPECS

POWERTRAIN: dual electric motors, 72kWh battery, AWD
PERFORMANCE: 428bhp, 364lb ft, 0–62mph in 4.4secs, 145mph
KERBWEIGHT: 1,919kg
ECONOMY: 4.2mpkWh, 360 miles

MILES SO FAR: 37,000 **OUR MPKWH:** 3.9

LOVED AND LOST

CARS WE ONCE OWNED THAT STOLE OUR HEARTS FOREVER

MINI 1275 GT

WRITTEN BY: ANDY DOW

Dear WAT 262S,

for all the nostalgia you provoke, you definitely deserved a better name. I chanced upon you at Kennings, Hull. One part exed Hillman and a grand's credit agreement later, you were mine – complete with a factory-fitted radio. Pure luxury! (Sorry Chris, mine was better, mate)

For three years, you were a brilliant daily driver … that one GT excursion to Jersey always made me chuckle. (How was I to know the missus' "trapped wind" was acute appendicitus? Would have missed the ferry if she hadn't have ran faster!)

Ended up having to sell you for the deposit on our first house – we got all £1,730 we needed BUT you were worth so much more.

Thanks for everything.

Andy

WHAT ELSE WE'RE RUNNING

REPORT 4

FORD RANGER RAPTOR

My life has definitely had a sprinkling of *Dukes of Hazzard* abandon thanks to having daily access to a Ranger Raptor. Burnouts? Yep, I'm almost ashamed to say they have become a regular. So, while the Raptor's incredible off-road capability is wasted on me, I'm getting the most out if it in other, unexpected ways. JB

REPORT 2

VAUXHALL ASTRA GSe

Why do carmakers use litres to measure bootspace? Oh right, *logic*. Let's use something better: golden retrievers! We managed to fit seven best friends into the boot of our Astra Sports Tourer. Being a hybrid means it loses underfloor space, but who cares when that space looks like this? VP

REPORT 2

LR DEFENDER 130

Time for the earth shattering 'ridiculously massive car has absolutely loads of space in the back' report. Yes, it has 2,291 litres of space, but there are issues: the rear opening isn't actually that tall or wide, the rear door that swings open works fine, but not if anything is parked within a metre of you… JR

PROJECT CORNER

Andy encounters trouble on his Herald rebuild

THE FRANKLIN FILES

WHAT IS IT? This Triumph Herald Convertible was our creative director's first car. Ignored for nearly 20 years, he's decided to bring it back to life
WRITER: *ANDY FRANKLIN*

ALAS, A NEW CHALLENGE FOR ME. By this point the sandblasters I had been using to salvage my Triumph's tired body had gone into administration (surprising given just how much of a beach they'd fired at the Triumph) so I thought I'd try getting it chemically dipped.

I found a suitable place and had it sent straight there. The bulkhead really is the backbone of the car so it was the missing piece I needed to start building it back up, and when I found an intact secondhand one, I knew it would save me thousands in welding and panels.

Then things went quiet. And quite badly wrong. A call from the dippers was not good news... "Er, we had an accident. I'm afraid we've dropped your bulkhead and it's completely caved in." Ah. Disaster. I thought I'd never get another one. But to my surprise they found and sourced another bulkhead which was in far better condition than the one I bought, and they only charged me for the etching primer. And that's currently where I'm up to.

Some front chassis work is next, then the new bulkhead will go on and hopefully by the next time I report my beloved Herald will be in a decent state. But for now it's in bits, and I need a lot more bits before it can go back together...

IT WOULDN'T BE
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ON SALE 10 DECEMBER
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RadioTimes

TOP FIVES FOR JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING

THE HOT LIST

PRIUS
PHEV
BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH
IRL
241-D-7503
TOYOTA.IE

CITY CARS

TG TIP
The £17k 3 trim has best blend of price and tech with heated seats and wireless phone charging

1

KIA PICANTO

PRICE: £15,595–£19,145

Fizzy, frugal and fun to drive, the tiny Picanto has been refined over three generations since 2003. The latest model got a welcome style injection when it was facelifted in 2023. There are surprisingly generous kit levels on offer, too

Aimed at: canny pensioners, new drivers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

HYUNDAI i10

PRICE: £16,030–£18,630

This tiny hatchback feels very grown up from behind the wheel, and the i10 is an eminently sensible city car choice with a strong spec. Great on holiday, too

Aimed at: car rental agencies

3

FIAT 500e

PRICE: £28,195–£34,195

One of the original retro tribute acts has matured into an EV while holding to its roots. Back's cramped, but there's still room for soft toys on the parcel shelf

Aimed at: retro hungry millennials

4

TOYOTA AYGO X

PRICE: £16,140–£20,0165

What do you get if you cross a city car and an SUV? The Aygo X, apparently – much cooler than the old Aygo, but that X is only worth 11mm of ride height

Aimed at: the kids

5

CITROEN AMI

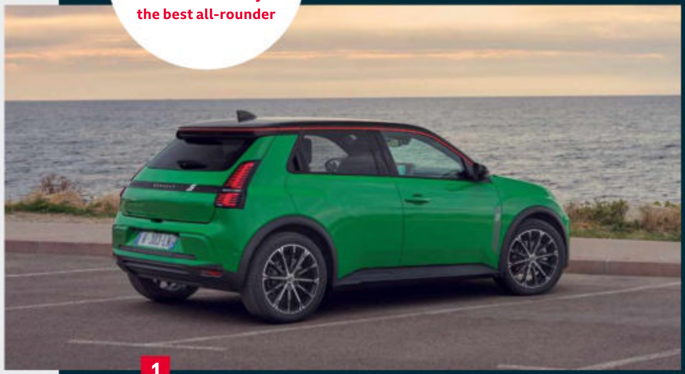
PRICE: £7,695–£8,595

Unlike the other cars here, the Ami really is just for the city, with a range of up to 46 miles and a top speed of 30mph. Still, quicker than getting the bus

Aimed at: antisocial commuters

SUPERMINIS

TG TIP
Orders open in January 2025. **Techno** trim with the 52kWh battery is the best all-rounder



1

RENAULT 5

PRICE: FROM £23,000 (EST)

There's a delicate line to tread with a retro modern take on a stone cold classic, but Renault has managed it well with its new 5. Nods to the past abound, but that doesn't stop the supermini from being a great all round small electric car

Aimed at: retrospectives

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

SUZUKI SWIFT

PRICE: £19,199–£21,549

Latest version of the Swift shows that cheap can still leave you feeling cheerful, especially with low monthly costs and the right kit levels

Aimed at: bargain hunters

3

RENAULT CLIO

PRICE: £17,995–£24,295

The hybrid version works out a bit expensive, but the Clio is as solid a buy as it ever was – a proven package with a bit of added French flair

Aimed at: Nicole, papa, *toute la famille*

4

MINI COOPER

PRICE: £23,150–£38,000

New Mini takes the car on in all the right ways, with a sharp exterior design and tech-focused interior that's fun but still useful. Ride's a bit firm, though

Aimed at: young professionals/estate agents

5

SKODA FABIA

PRICE: £19,730–£25,630

No electric whizzery here, just a great all-rounder with a solid 1.0-litre 3cyl petrol engine and some nifty interior touches (like the door umbrella)

Aimed at: sensible folks

FAMILY HATCHBACKS

TG TIP
Hybrid only, and stick to entry level **Elegance** trim for decent kit and best economy

1

HONDA CIVIC

PRICE: £35,005–£39,805

The strange thing about the Honda Civic is how wildly it veers from one generation to the next – you get a crazy one, then a sensible one, a crazy one... This current version is the sensible one, but that's not a bad thing – it might be conservative on the outside, but the interior is simply put together and to a high standard. You won't mind long family journeys, and you know that it'll all last for miles and miles. There's a strangely complex hybrid setup under the bonnet, but you needn't worry about all that, because the upshot is that the car drives and handles well enough, but won't cost you the earth in petrol bills. See, sometimes it does pay to be a little sensible. Though if you do want the Civic to be a bit crazy you can always go for the Type R version, which delivers in spades

Aimed at: spreadsheet users

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

SKODA OCTAVIA

PRICE: £26,775–£36,000

There must be a few noses out of joint in the darkest corporate depths of the VW Group – of the host of cars based on the MkVIII Golf, the Skoda's the best

Aimed at: people with sensible shoes

3

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF

PRICE: £27,420–£45,145

Long the benchmark in this sector, the crown has slipped a little in this eighth generation guise. We wouldn't count the Golf out for long though

Aimed at: everyone

4

MG4

PRICE: £26,995–£36,495

Popped up out of nowhere to become one of the easiest to recommend electric family hatchbacks around. Even looks good in orange

Aimed at: early adopters/taxi drivers

5

RENAULT MEGANE E-TECH

PRICE: £33,995–£37,995

The strange thing about the latest Megane is that it doesn't excel anywhere, but overall adds up to a great family car that happens to be electric too

Aimed at: stylish school runs

BEST COUPE SUV

KIA EV6

PRICE: from £45,575

Not your traditional coupe SUV, but the electric EV6 is all the better for not being a less practical and uglier version of an existing hatchback. Kia's recently refreshed SUV is sharp and cool, gunning for the middle ground that used to be the domain of the family hatchback

Aimed at: Mondeo man

HOT HATCHES

TG TIP
Don't be tempted by the £3.8k **Carbon Pack**, it's expensive enough as it is...

1

HONDA CIVIC TYPE R

PRICE: £50,050

Forget the slightly traditional setup of our 2022 Car of the Year, Honda's Type R follows the original hot hatch template fairly slavishly but it has kept it feeling brilliant fresh. The electric ones have a lot of work to do if they want to compete

Aimed at: purists

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

TOYOTA GR YARIS

PRICE: £44,250–£60,000

The best Toyota ever? It really could be. This first version was a hoot to drive – fun at all speeds in all weathers. Updated one gets more bhp and an auto

Aimed at: cognoscenti

3

HYUNDAI IONIQ 5 N

PRICE: £65,000

The hot hatch for the computer games generations is rammed full of gimmicks, but is still able to back it up where it really counts – on the road

Aimed at: gamers

4

ALPINE A290

PRICE: £TBC

It's a pincer movement – the old R5 Turbo was an OG hot hatch and the A110 is one of the best sports cars of the modern era. Thankfully the A290 is quite good

Aimed at: sentimentalists?

5

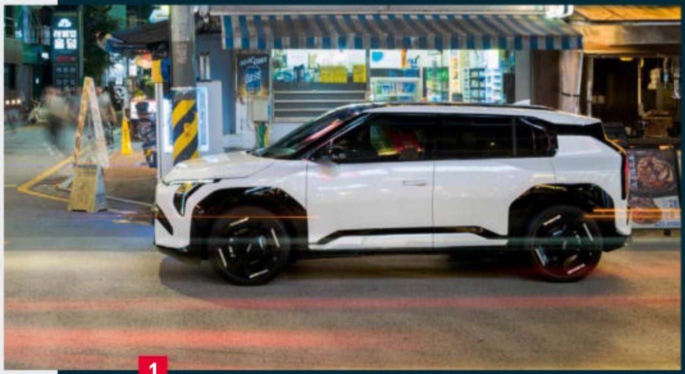
FORD FOCUS ST

PRICE: £37,705–£42,905

Practically Jurassic these days, but with the top notch driving controls and overall experience this old stager can still show the youngsters where to go

Aimed at: budget purists

CROSSOVERS



1

KIA EV3

PRICE: £32,995–£43,895

The Kianaissance continues apace, with an intriguing small electric effort that's finally delivering some of what we want from EVs. It's stylish, full of interesting details, about as fuss free as electric motoring gets and efficient too

Aimed at: punctual adopters

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

DACIA DUSTER

PRICE: £17,295–£23,695

If you're going to go back to basics then you really need to nail those essentials, which the Duster has managed effortlessly into its second generation

Aimed at: bargain hunters

3

VOLVO EX30

PRICE: £33,044–£43,500

The EX30 is full of Scandi cool and delightfully simple to live with. Space is admittedly tight in the back, but the interior quality makes up for it.

Aimed at: stylish families

4

FORD PUMA

PRICE: £25,800–£33,050

The UK's official bestseller has taken on the torch of the Fiesta as a decent little car with solid appeal across the board. Just don't mention the old one

Aimed at: everyone

5

HYUNDAI KONA

PRICE: £26,040–£43,095

Korean carmaker's bold design streak continues with the latest Kona, which remains a solid family car. EV's a great first toe in the electric waters

Aimed at: number crunchers

LUXURY SUVs

TG TIP
P510e hybrid is the way to go – in **Vogue SE** trim it's all the Range Rover you'll ever need

RANGE ROVER
KY22 UGU

1

RANGE ROVER

PRICE: £104,025–£192,000

Arguably the original lifestyle SUV, the Range Rover has evolved massively since the 1970 original, developing into a luxury beast. The latest one hasn't just nailed the brief, it has set the benchmark for everyone else to follow

Aimed at: cash buyers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

VOLVO EX90

PRICE: FROM £96,255

The old XC90 was starting to get left behind, but the new EX90 has wrestled its way to the front of the post SUV queue while remaining as charming as ever

Aimed at: polo necks

3

FERRARI PUROSANGUE

PRICE: £313,360

Ferrari says this definitely isn't an SUV, but ironically with its sporty credentials it's probably the most SUV out of all the SUVs that have ever been made

Aimed at: posers

4

ROLLS-ROYCE CULLINAN

PRICE: £298,800–£342,600

Even Rolls-Royce had to follow the money and make an SUV. Fortunately you can't see what it looks like from the back seat – that's the place to enjoy it

Aimed at: old money

5

BMW iX

PRICE: £70,985–£124,605

This tech-laden electric SUV takes a different approach to luxury – it's still comfortable, but it dazzles with interesting materials and nice touches

Aimed at: tech VPs

OFF-ROADERS

TG TIP
An entry level **90 S** for us at £55k, then we'd go a bit crazy on the options list

1

LR DEFENDER

PRICE: £57,420–£145,300

The classic Defender was one of those cars that everyone had a strong opinion about, but no one was really buying. A tough job, then, renewing an icon for a modern age. The latest Defender isn't a mere upgrade, it's a fresh take on the four-by-format

Aimed at: school run mums

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

TOYOTA LAND CRUISER

PRICE: £74,995–£79,995

It's not as attractive as the Defender if you live in, say, Wimbledon, but the retro latest Land Cruiser has all the necessary off-road credentials if you don't

Aimed at: peacekeepers

3

MERCEDES-BENZ G-CLASS

PRICE: £136,690–£203,595

The looks of the G-Wagen are the same as they've ever been, but that masks the progress that's been made under the skin. The new electric one is fun

Aimed at: original gangsters

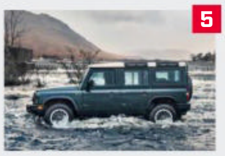
4

FORD RANGER

PRICE: £34,260–£60,960

Like a good pair of jeans, the Ranger is able to switch seamlessly from work to play, no wonder it's a trades favourite. A little bit large for parts of the UK though

Aimed at: sole traders



5

INEOS GRENADIER

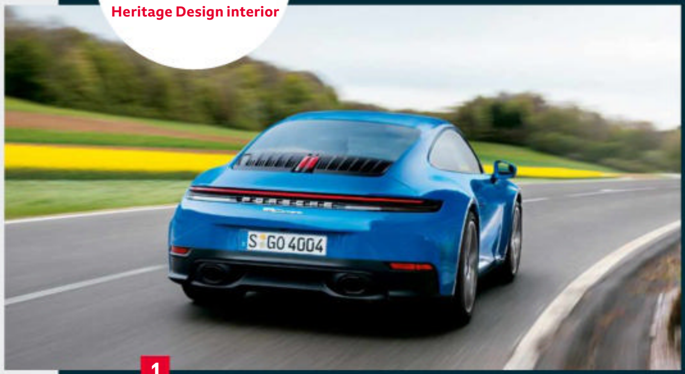
PRICE: £51,931–£79,140

A passion project from a rich old billionaire who wanted a modernised version of his compromised old 4x4. Fair enough, seems to have managed it

Aimed at: old rich men

SPORTS CARS

TG TIP
Into driving? Carrera T. For everyday use, it's the base Carrera with Heritage Design interior



1

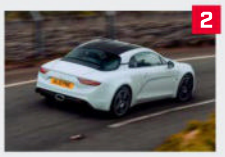
PORSCHE 911

PRICE: £99,800–£139,100

The definitive sports car, despite its inherent layout flaws, because it's been ruthlessly honed millimetre by millimetre over the past 70 years by people who really know what they're doing. Newly facelifted 992.2 version even has a hybrid option

Aimed at: heavyweights

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

ALPINE A110

PRICE: £54,490

This stripped down French number has managed to take up the baton for feathery, beautifully handling sports cars since Lotus gave up trying

Aimed at: lightweights

3

TOYOTA GR86

PRICE: £32,495

The back to basics sports car is destined to be a future classic, and it's one of the best cars that Toyota's made (but it's no GR Yaris)

Aimed at: purists

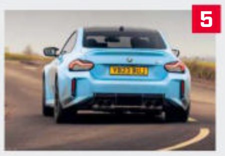
4

PORSCHE 718 CAYMAN 4.0

PRICE: £75,300

Sure, it's getting old, but the Cayman is one of those compelling driver's cars that we need to celebrate while they're still allowed to be on sale

Aimed at: B-road blasters



5

BMW M2

PRICE: £49,990

The latest version of the BMW M2 is more grown up than it used to be, but doesn't that apply to us all? It's a great daily driver that grows on you over time

Aimed at: wealthier purists

SUPERCARS

TG TIP
Don't have the £6,250 super lightweight carbon seats. Regular buckets are much better

1

McLAREN 750S

PRICE: £244,760

Launched in 2023 as a successor to the 720S, McLaren really stepped it up with this car – it's better to drive than its predecessor, but crucially it's also better to sit in and easier to operate. It even comes with Apple CarPlay...

Aimed at: rich Shanghai drivers

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

FERRARI 296 GTB

PRICE: £241,550

People got nervous when they heard this Ferrari supercar would be a V6 hybrid... they needn't have worried, it all serves to make it a better drive

Aimed at: self-made business people

3

LAMBORGHINI REVUELTO

PRICE: £446,742

There's hybrid tech in there, but there's also a socking V12 in what could very well be the best Lamborghini since the iconic 1960s Miura

Aimed at: high rollers

4

PORSCHE 911 GT3 RS

PRICE: £192,600

You've got to be a good driver to get the most out of the GT3 RS's repertoire, but Porsche has thrown everything it has at this racer for the road

Aimed at: amateur racers

5

McLAREN ARTURA

PRICE: £189,200

The conservative exterior serves to hide some big developments under the skin – ssh, but the Artura might even be a better daily driver than the 296 GTB

Aimed at: brave buyers

HYPERCARS

TG TIP
It'd be sacrilegious to change anything on Gordon's car, but he'll paint it how you like

1

GMA T.50

PRICE: £2.8 MILLION

Gordon Murray had already done it all with the McLaren F1 back in the 1990s, but you always sensed he had a bit more to prove. And here's the result, the car that shows lightning doesn't just strike twice, it'll do it exactly where Gordon tells it to. "The last great analogue supercar" was what Gordon Murray promised – and he's delivered it with relentless attention to detail and a dedication to the end prize. With the electric era almost upon us, we'll probably never see the likes of this pure, undiluted V12-powered monster ever again. It's not just the sum of Murray's knowhow and experience distilled into a ruthless hypercar, you can get something out of it without being an F1 driver, it's an enjoyable drive for whoever happens to be behind the wheel. Your move, everyone else

Aimed at: loaded enthusiasts

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...

2

PAGANI UTOPIA

PRICE: £2.2 MILLION

In a truly utopian society we'd all be driving one of these. It's not bad for a third car – easy to forget that Pagani's been very discerning about its model lineup

Aimed at: tech billionaires

3

ASTON MARTIN VALKYRIE

PRICE: £3 MILLION

The 'F1 car for the road' line has become a bit of a cliche, but the Valkyrie is certainly visceral and noisy enough to be considered that way

Aimed at: rich collectors

4

KOENIGSEGG JESKO

PRICE: £2.9 MILLION

Well it's named after the boss's dad, so it had to be a good car – and it is. Certainly worthy of a pat on the head, well done son

Aimed at: Monaco residents

5

BUGATTI CHIRON

PRICE: £3.2 MILLION

If the Veyron was the Volkswagen Group's moonshot, the Chiron reaches for the stars at warp speed. How do you follow this?

Aimed at: old money

BEST HYBRID

TOYOTA PRIUS

PRICE: from £37,315

The Prius has rather suffered in recent years from its associations with app-based private hire firms, but the latest version (now plug-in hybrid only) has the potential to sort all that out. It's stylish, spacious, more frugal than ever and even, dare we say it, a little bit cool?

Aimed at: anyone but taxi drivers

BIG FAMILY CARS

TG TIP
It only costs £500 extra to go for the **7-seat** over the 5-seat model – a no brainer

1

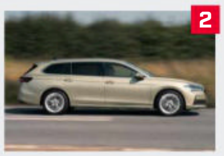
VW ID.BUZZ 7-SEAT

PRICE: £59,035–£67,585

The ID.Buzz is not merely another retro face (that's the sugar on the electric pill), in many ways it's an innovative bit of family transport, especially in its seven-seater guise that finally releases the practicality the car needed

Aimed at: lifestyle families

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

SKODA SUPERB ESTATE

PRICE: £36,165–£47,400

This car has always had to be good with a name like that, but it's hard to think of any other family estate out there that does a better job for the money

Aimed at: posh families

3

BMW i5 TOURING

PRICE: £69,945–£99,995

You wait ages for an electric family estate and then a brilliant one comes along all at once. Shows off all of BMW's electric knowhow and body control wizardry

Aimed at: the outside lane

4

HYUNDAI SANTA FE

PRICE: £46,775–£57,635

Stylish, well built, comfortable and quiet – not to mention loads of room inside for carrying people and stuff. Hyundai's hot streak continues

Aimed at: sensible families

5

DACIA JOGGER

PRICE: £18,295–£20,595

The Jogger is a masterpiece of cutting out the unnecessary (weight *and* money) while maintaining the fundamentals of a useful family estate

Aimed at: clever families

GRAND TOURERS

TG TIP
Got a dog? Aston's got you – the **Pet Pack** throws in a bed and a portable washer

1

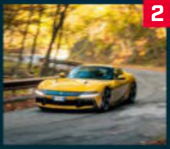
ASTON VANQUISH

PRICE: FROM £330,000

The Vanquish has been reborn – sounds a little grand, but the latest version has brought the car right up to date for its third incarnation. It mixes an exciting drive with genuine grand touring ability in a way that must have all its rivals quaking

Aimed at: secret agents

OR YOU COULD HAVE ONE OF THESE...



2

FERRARI 12CILINDRI

PRICE: £336,500

Ferrari has softened the edges off the 12Cilindri's forebears to create a car that's probably the most capable all-rounder to have come out of Maranello

Aimed at: loafer wearers

3

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT

PRICE: £152,820–£257,700

If you had to drive really far there's probably no car you'd rather be in than the Continental GT. Except maybe a chauffeur driven Phantom of course

Aimed at: pipe smokers

4

PORSCHE 911 TURBO

PRICE: £159,100

The 911 range is like one of those Italian gelaterias with hundreds of flavours – seems excessive, but we love them all. Turbo might be the pick of the bunch

Aimed at: daily drivers

5

MERCEDES-AMG GT COUPE

PRICE: £164,905–£191,745

The new second generation GT has developed into a great all-rounder, a usable day to day car that straddles the line between mainstream and exotic

Aimed at: sharp suits

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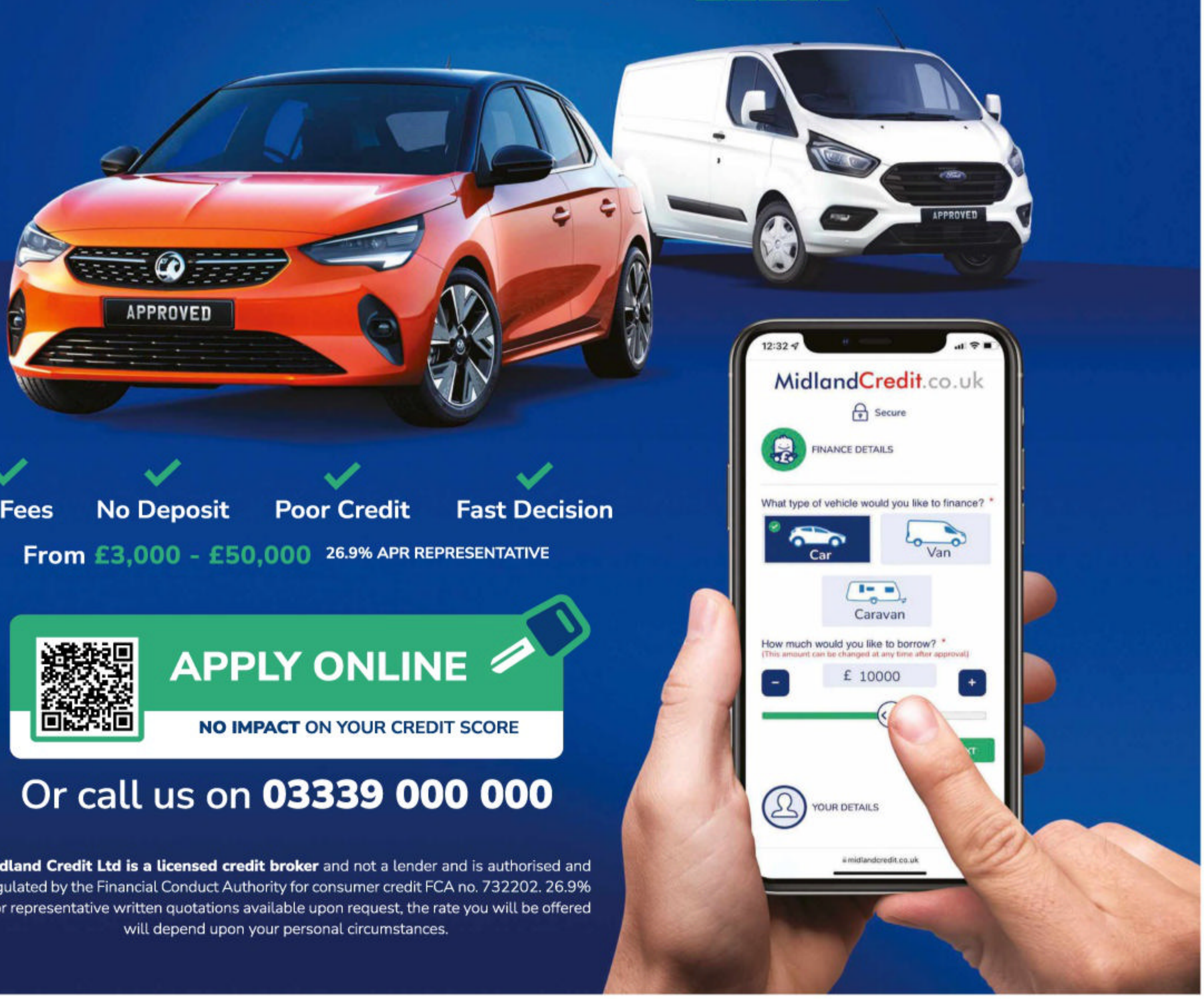
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HOW TO...

Change a tyre

This seems like it must be simple, but it looks like hard work. I can't be any clearer than explaining my firm belief that there's no point doing anything you can pay someone else with expertise to do for you. Obviously a man of my means has to prioritise, but changing a tyre is definitely for the professionals. Mrs Burnett is not of the same philosophy though, she would make me change the tyre. There's help for every problem on the internet and I find myself watching an old fellow who gives 'dad advice' showing how to whip off a dud set of treads in 60 seconds. Great, a minute is about as long as I could sustain interest in the process.

Car parked up, the old fellow says you have to loosen your wheel nuts a quarter of a turn before you jack the car up. You should make sure your handbrake is on at this point before you get the jack going. There's nothing worse than having your car roll away when you're trying to hoik it up for a bit of light mechanical work. Well, there are a magnitude of worse things, but this isn't the place to discuss matcha tea or genocide.

The old chap has already said several times that you should consult the manual to find things out – mine is in a box in the study because I prefer the extra in-car storage and most things can be Googled, but perhaps I should rethink my approach. It would double as a handy wheel chock in this instance. There are particular points on the car where you should jack the car up – check the manual, says our man. He doesn't say what would happen if you picked a wrong spot. I can imagine that lifting a car up by the plastic bumpers isn't a good idea, but will it end up shaped like a banana if you accidentally pick some soft tissue as your jacking point? I'm not curious enough about this to find out.

Wiggling all the nuts off and removing the tyre is covered in a matter of seconds, this old guy makes it all seem easy, but then he looks like he's been whipping off flats since Eisenhower. He says you have to take the spare, line up the holes with your lugs, then get the nuts on finger tight. There's a raging undercurrent of innuendo here that I won't be exploring on the back page of *TopGear*. The old guy has meanwhile finished swapping the wheel while I've had this thought and I'm not sure I can watch the video again. I've checked my car anyway, it's only got a can of expanding foam under the boot floor. Ah...

> **"I believe there's no point doing anything you can pay someone else to do for you"**

WORDS: SAM BURNETT **PHOTOGRAPHY:** GETTY

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